River of Eternity

Philip José Farmer

Trade edition: $17.00
Special edition: $40.00

River of Eternity

Philip José Farmer

River of Eternity was written some thirty years ago. This is its first publication anywhere.

In 1952 Philip José Farmer made the decision to enter the Shasta Science-Fiction Prize Novel Contest. He won that contest and **River of Eternity** was to be published the following year. The fact that it has never seen print until this edition makes its history one of the most interesting in the publishing industry.

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RIVER OF ETERNITY

Philip José Farmer

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Huntington Woods, Michigan
1983

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RIVER OF ETERNITY

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Author's Introduction

At 10 A.M. on Thursday, August 12, 1983, just as my fingers were poised to write the first word of this introduction, I saw a tiny object floating down before me. Though I could not see it clearly without bending forward, I knew it had to be a spider. What else could be coming down from the ceiling so slowly and in a straight line?

It was what I'd thought, a very minute and pale arachnid. It landed on the paper just above the back topside of the typewriter, disengaged itself from its line, seemed to hesitate, then turned away from me. It disappeared over the edge of the sheet and is now somewhere on my desk.

If it had taken the opposite direction, toward the inner works of my Selectric II, I would probably have picked it up and squeezed it. End of one spider though I'm rather fond of the Martian-looking things. I allow them to thrive and eat flies, which I hate, unless they become a nuisance or my wife sees them.

I at once thought of the old story of Bruce and the spider. What I got out of the story when I was a child was the moral that you don't give up no matter what the obstacles. What I got out of the spider incident just happening was that events of my life might have been very different if I had not elected to enter the Shasta Science-Fiction Prize Novel Contest.

This decision not taken would have been in the fall of 1952. I had recently quit my job at Keystone Steel & Wire,

a steel mill where I had worked for eleven and a half years. I was now a full-time fiction writer. I was thirty-four, a resident of Peoria, Illinois, had a wife and two small children, and owned the house I was living in—as long as I kept up the monthly payments. I had sold "The Lovers" and a novel and some short stories to science-fiction magazines. I felt with all the confidence that ignorance gives that I could support my family in the style to which we had become accustomed. (Which wasn't much. We didn't even have a car.) I'd read a lot of books in many fields and had a B.A. in English, but my knowledge of the publishing industry was equal to that of a Saharan Bedouin about sharks. I was naive and idealistic, which meant, though I didn't know it, that I was bound to get into trouble.

The prize novel contest was the idea of Melvin "Earl" Korshak. He was the owner and president of Shasta, a small Chicago publishing house which specialized in hardcover s-f and fantasy books. It had put out some fine books which are now collectors' items. (I used to have many, all—alas!—destroyed in 1968 in a flash flood in Los Angeles.) The vice-president of Shasta was Ted Dikty, who was married to Julian May. Korshak had arranged with Pocket Books, Inc., to add three thousand dollars to Shasta's one thousand for the four thousand that the winning novelist would get. Shasta would publish the hardcover; Pocket Books, the softcover. Korshak would handle the contest and also the financial, administrative, and literary details.

Four thousand was a lot of money then, and, if the softcover novel sold well, it would bring in much more. Moreover, the distribution was by a national publisher, not a specialty house.

I was tempted for some time to enter the contest. But it was not until only a month was left before the contest ended that I decided to enter it. That meant that I had to get the basic idea for the book, plot it, outline it, write the rough draft, type the final draft, and get the manuscript to Shasta within thirty days.

There was not time to make a detailed outline. I plunged into the writing and spent twelve to fourteen hours a day, sometimes sixteen, every day of the week at the typewriter.

As soon as I'd finished ten or twelve pages and made changes and corrections with a pencil, one of three people would do the final typing for the batch. These were Randall Garrett, who was living with us at the time, Reverend John Bloomquist, who lived next door, and my wife Bette. Garrett was a science-fiction writer who had come from Cincinnati, Ohio to celebrate Christmas with us and did not leave until about three years later. Bloomquist had been a minister of a local church but had been forced to resign because he preached too many sermons about flying saucers. Later, he became a dianetics auditor and then a scientologist. Bette also did retyping when she was not cooking, cleaning, taking care of the children, and remodeling the house

The novel, which I think I originally titled *Owe For The Flesh*, flowed like The River. And sometimes, like the people venturing up The River, I didn't know where it was going until I got there On the last day of the contest, I finished 150,000 words. The last twenty pages were retyped, and I rushed down to the post office (in a bus or a street car, I don't remember which), and got the manuscript postmarked in time. I was exhausted. It was a week before I could get started on another story. (Which was rejected by John Campbell of *Astounding* and Horace Gold of *Galaxy*, an old story for me.) I don't remember how long it was before Korshak phoned to tell me that my entry had won, but it seemed like a very long time then.

But I'd won, and I had the world by the tail The world, however, turned out to be a glass snake The tail would break off, and the reptile would scoot away into the bushes

The great day approached when Mr. Lewis, a vice-president of Pocket Books (and Sinclair Lewis' nephew) would be in Chicago to give me the check Newspaper reporters would be present to record the event Pretty heady stuff for a rube from Peoria.

However, I didn't have enough money for the train to Chicago and back. Korshak said that the check from Pocket Books was not available but he would advance me the money for the trip. This would be deducted from the prize money.

Bette asked him why he couldn't give his share of the

prize money, the thousand dollars. I don't remember his explanation, but it was rather evasive.

Before the big check-giving ceremony, Bette and I went to the Shasta offices, which were in the basement of a building. We met Korshak, Dikty, and Julian May. They were very friendly, and I was tickled to death to meet May. Her first story in *Astounding* had really impressed me. I didn't, however, like the brusque manner of Korshak toward Dikty. He treated his junior partner as if he were the janitor.

Lewis, Korshak, and I went some place (don't remember where), and we were photographed at the moment Korshak handed me the check. Which was without a sum or a signature. Had he told me that it would be a blank before we went to the ceremony or did I find out when I was handed the check? I don't remember. If I were writing a novel, I'd make it the latter scene. In any event, his excuse was that Pocket Books wanted the novel cut. One hundred and fifty thousand words made a volume too big and expensive for Pocket Books to offer it to a public that had never heard of me. Besides, it was science-fiction, a relatively unknown field. Etc.

I was upset, and Bette was furious. On the train for Peoria, she said that the whole deal was mighty fishy. Moreover, she didn't trust Korshak. He was too smooth and had sneaky eyes. And why would Pocket Books first accept the novel and then suggest a cutting-down? Why hadn't it said at the beginning that it would accept the novel only if it were cut? I should withdraw from the contest. Etc.

Meanwhile, I'd contracted with Shasta for a hardcover edition of an expansion of my *Startling Stories* novelet, "The Lovers." I did get, after some months of delay, an advance on the contract of (if I remember correctly) a hundred dollars. That kept us going for a while as did several other advances of a hundred dollars each by Korshak on the long-delayed prize contest money. But the rewrite kept me from writing other stories, and then Bette had an accident which made her unable to work. The doctor and hospital bills piled up.

Finally, we did what we should have done the moment

we got the blank check. We got an agent. I don't remember her name, but she was John Steinbeck's agent She saw science-fiction as an up-and-coming thing and wanted an s-f writer to handle Having heard our story, she went to Pocket Books and relayed it. The time bomb which Korshak must have known would explode sooner or later did indeed go off.

Pocket Books had long ago sent its three thousand dollars to Korshak Pocket Books had not asked for a rewrite or any cutting. In fact, it had not as yet received the manuscript from Korshak and could not understand the delay.

I then found out that two other writers, John Campbell and Raymond Jones, had not received their due moneys for their Shasta books.

The truth rose violently out of the troubled waters like a hooked sailfish. Korshak had taken my prize money and the proceeds from Campbell's and Jones' books and sunk them into a project which he thought would be a surefire best-seller From what those in the know told me, Korshak had not intended to cheat us He had "borrowed" our money to finance a big and expensively illustrated book written (supposedly) by a famous Hollywood make-up artist The book was one hundred percent sure to sell to millions of ugly ducklings who would want to know the beauty secrets of the movie stars.

The book thudded. Korshak was heavily in debt Campbell, Jones, and I were out in the cold. We were owed, but we three plucked chickens did not bother suing to get our feathers back We couldn't squeeze tears from a stone

Korshak took bankruptcy and then set up a dummy corporation for another publishing venture This collapsed Korshak lost his business, his apartment, his dog, and his wife He became an M.C. in a third-rate nightclub. At last, he had found his true niche in life. So we thought for a while. Then his rich uncle died and left him a sizeable sum. He went to California where, I heard, he failed the bar examination and so was frustrated in his desire to be a lawyer Other sources, however, said that he had succeeded in becoming a lawyer.

I never heard from him or Dikty again, but I did hear of them indirectly through a literary agent for an Argentinean publisher. Korshak had sold the publishers the rights to publish *The Lovers* even though the contract had long ago expired because of lack of payment on it from Korshak. What made it worse was that Korshak had not even bothered to send them the manuscript.

Moreover, Mel Turner had painted a magnificent illustration for the dust jacket art for *The Lovers*. (I saw it during the visit to Shasta's office.) Turner was not paid for the painting, and Korshak did not return it to Turner.

Events went from bad to worse for Bette and me. I won't go into just how bad they were. I did quit full-time writing and get a job as a laborer for a dairy. This kept me in good physical condition, and I got all the free ice cream I wanted to eat while on the job. Pocket Books was so disgusted with their first encounter with science-fiction that it washed its hands of the whole affair. Since there seemed to be no market for the Riverworld novel, I put the manuscripts in the "trunk."

In 1963 or early 1964, about eleven years after I'd written the first version, I was living in Scottsdale, Arizona and working as a technical writer for Motorola's military electronics division. The market for s-f novels was much better now. Working evenings and weekends, I expanded and radically rewrote the original Riverworld novel, the first version.

The first one had been 150,000 words long. The second, as I remembered it, had been about 70,000 words. The third came out to 137,000 words.

The character based on Sir Richard Francis Burton had been called Richard Black in the first version. Sam Clemens was called Sam Halley. The reason for this was that I thought that if I used the real names I might be sued by their descendants or relatives. I didn't have time when I started writing to find out if this was true or not. The Fyodor Borbich in the first and second versions was, of course, Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Why I should have worried about his descendants, if any, suing me, I don't know. Perhaps I thought it best to keep all historical figures under fictional

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(A comment. Bleiler at no time was aware of the deal that Korshak was pulling on me. By the time that it all came out, he had long ago departed from any connections with Shasta.)

Ezekiel Hardy appeared in the first and second versions. He was once a living man, and he is to be found in the early part of *Moby Dick*. Rather, his epitaph is. Hardy did not appear in the Putnams series, however, until *The Dark Design*, and he played a much smaller role than in the earlier versions.

Phyllis McBairn, Burton's (Black's) lover was a fictional character though based on a woman I once knew. She's in the first three versions. Alice Hargreaves does not appear until the third version and then late in the novel. In this, she was Frigate's lover.

The Joe Caveman, the Titanthrop, who is in the book at hand became Joe Miller in the third version.

Goldberg, who appears in the first and second versions, became Lev Ruach in the third.

For the third version I did considerable replotting, dropped some characters, and introduced many new ones. Charbrass became Firebrass. The wood-burning steamboat operated by Clemens became electrically fueled. Why not use the grailstones, the source of a power much superior to that of wood and much more quickly gotten?

While Randall Garrett was living with us, I gave him some ideas to help out on his stories, and he reciprocated by giving me some. He had a ball working out the theory of the steam-operated machine guns used on the *Not For Hire*. He loved gadgets. He also worked out in detail the construction and operation of the breech-loading, black-powder .50-caliber pistols shooting plastic bullets.

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In the first version, The River originated in the North Pole Sea of the Riverworld, wound down one hemisphere, circled the South Pole, and wound back up across the other hemisphere to empty into the North Pole Sea. The second version had a different setup for the flow and origin of The River. (See the chart herein.) I don't know why I altered the original setup. Perhaps I thought that it was more practical. Anyway, I went back in the third version to the Midgard Serpent flow of The River which I'd used in the first version.

There are many things in the book at hand that scholars and others interested in such matters may compare with the final versions published by Putnams.

It seemed to me that the third version, *Owe For A River*, was an improvement over the first two. I sent the manuscript to Betty Ballantine, who returned it with the comment that the book seemed to be more adventure than anything else. I thought this rather strange since *The Green Odyssey*, published by Ballantine Books, was an adventure-type s-f novel and so were many others issued by Ballantine. Also, *Owe For A River* may not have been as deep as Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, but it certainly had many novel ideas and an undeniable philosophical basis.

Disappointed but undaunted, I sent the manuscript to Fred Pohl, editor of *Galaxy*, *Worlds of IF*, and *Worlds of Tomorrow*. Pohl returned the manuscript with the comment that, though the novel was very long, it was still too compressed. The concept was just too big to do justice to in one novel or even two and perhaps three. Why didn't I rewrite it as a series of novelets which could appear in one of his magazines? This would allow me to develop the immense potentialities of The Riverworld.

O.K. Splendid idea. So, once more to the rewriting, the fourth version. Now I began the story twenty years before the first three versions had begun. With Burton's death and then his resurrection with thirty-five billion plus others on the banks of The River.

This was the novelet, "The Day of the Great Shout," which appeared in *Worlds of Tomorrow*, January issue 1965. "Riverworld," a novelet about Tom Mix and Jesus

Christ and not part of the mainstream of the series, came out in the January 1966 WOT. Then the sequel to the "Shout", "The Suicide Express," appeared in the March issue of WOT, 1966.

The next two stories had Sam Clemens as their protagonist. These were the 1967 "The Felled Star," *Worlds of If*, July and August issues, and the 1971 "The Fabulous Riverboat," June and August.

The two Burton novelets and the two Clemens novelets formed the basis for the Putnams editions of *To Your Scattered Bodies Go* and *The Fabulous Riverboat* I was off, though not running, and the final in the mainstream of the Riverworld series, *Gods of Riverworld*, came out in the Phantasia Press edition in this month. The Putnams trade edition will be out in a month or so. It took me from 1952 to 1983 to complete the series, thirty-one years However, I've been pretty busy between the Riverworld novels

The story of how you got the book at hand is a strange one. A few years ago I mentioned to Alex Berman of Phantasia Press that I'd like to see the original Riverworld novel in print. Perhaps others would, too However, the only complete copy of the first version had been given to an s-f convention for auction sometime in the late 1960's or early 1970's Unfortunately, I couldn't remember who had purchased the manuscript Alex advertised for the manuscript but without success.

Then I was told that Dan Alderson of Tujunga, California had a copy. I got into contact with him, and he generously let me have a copy of his copy. After looking at it, I became convinced that his copy was of the second version, not the first. However, I was sure that the second version was only about 70,000 words long. This was about 137,000 words So much for memory, I thought.

Just as Alex and I were on the verge of negotiating a contract for a Phantasia Press edition of the copy, I got a package and a letter from Everett Bleiler While going through some boxes of stuff in his garage, Bleiler had found a Riverworld manuscript Having found out through circuitous channels that I was looking for the first version, he generously sent me the manuscript But its title, its length,

and textual evidence showed me that this was the version I'd unnecessarily written at Korshak's request.

What Dan Alderson had thought was the first version was actually the third, the one sent to Fred Pohl What Bleiler had thought was the first version was actually the second

What you have in hand is the second version of the original, *Owe For The Flesh.* The first is probably lost forever Still, it's possible that someone might find it in a box or attic and send it to me. Bleiler's discovery was for me a miracle, and another may occur.

I have resisted the temptation to polish the manuscript It is just as it came from my typewritter in 1953 except for some typos that I would have corrected before it went to the typesetters—if it had gone to them

Final comment. Though Korshak was not trying to do me a favor when he was using me as a prize sucker for his prize contest, he did so. The delayed publication and the many rewrites and the elapsed time ended in making the Riverworld saga much different and better I should be grateful to him, and, in a way, I am I learned a lot I improved my writing skills I gained experience and the time needed for the Riverworld to mature.

For the writer, all is grist for the mill—if the writer does not get ground down between the stones

Philip José Farmer

TO MY WIFE, BETTE, WHOSE PERCEPTION AND COURAGE HAVE ENABLED ME TO WRITE

Thanks are due also to John Bloomquist and Randall Garrett for their invaluable suggestions and work in preparing the map and the manuscript.

This novel is complete in itself, but it is part of a much larger project, a paramyth tentatively titled I OWE FOR THE FLESH, composed of four books THE GREAT CRY, A STATE OF HONESTY, THE RIVER OF ETERNITY, and THE PADDLE WHEELED COMET.

Any resemblance to anybody is not coincidental, for this book is populated with all of humanity and some that are not human.

Nous ne sommes pas dans un monde naturel.

—Michelet

Where 'twill be man's to see the whole
Of what on Earth he sees in part

—The Kasidah

He is one of those who don't want millions, but an answer to their questions.

I maintain that it (hell) is the suffering of being unable to love.

"Karamazov," cried Kolya, "can it be true . . . that we shall all rise again from the dead and shall live and see each other again, all, Ilusha, too?"

—The Brothers Karamazov

Make the gravest allegories and interpretations you wish, muse upon it, you and everyone else, as long as you like. For *my* part I see nothing but the obscurely worded description of a game of tennis.

—Gargantua

I would be free as air; and I'm down in the whole world's books I am so rich . . . and yet I owe for the flesh in the tongue I brag with.

—Moby Dick

RIVER OF ETERNITY

I

BY THE WATERS OF TIME

1.

"You owe for the flesh," said the shadowy and cloaked figure

Richard Black groaned and tried to step back from the mysterious speaker.

"Pay up," added the figure.

"Where's your bill?" asked Richard Black. "I'd like an itemized account."

"Itemized account?" thundered the voice from beneath the darkness of the hood. "You really want one? Then look around. And also look within the blackness. You'll find the bill there. And everywhere."

A long, pale, and shapely, almost feminine hand was extended from beneath the cloak. It reached inside Black's chest, its fingers sliding smoothly through the flesh, fastened

onto something, twisted it loose, and withdrew. Blood dripped from the hand and the object held daintily within the white fingers, fingers curiously unstained.

"Your heart."

"Give it back," pleaded Black, conscious at the same time that his request was the strangest aspect of the dream so far.

There was something horrible in the idea that he would ever plead with anyone. It was beyond belief, and yet he was doing it.

Stung by the realization that he had retreated, he boldly stepped forward and peered into the obscurity beneath the hood. At first he saw only jagged and unconnected streaks of paleness. Then, as he stared until his eyes hurt, the rags of light and the tatters of darkness fluttered together and wove themselves into a new and glossy fabric. And it crinkled and folded itself into the likeness of a face.

It was a man's, and it was one of the most sinister he had ever seen. Such an admission from Black meant much, for during his seventy-one years on Earth and twenty years on the planet of The Valley, he had traveled far and long and high and deep, and he had encountered the ultimate in evil and degradation.

Yet these features were not bestial nor sunken to low depths. Their sinisterness was voiced by their powerfulness and craggedness, by a suppressed animalism shining through the human visage, ripples of a driving pantherish energy, the hidden and savage reflex of the rebel.

Certainly, they formed a contradiction, for the forehead was wide and lofty, a thinker's, while the jutting cheekbones, the lean taut cheeks, the full lips, the bold straight nose, the sweeping jaw, the chin hard and rounded as a fist, and the sullen yet magnetic eyes were the man of action's.

Altogether, they suggested the fallen Lucifer, the tortured Prometheus. Lucifer, who lusted for all of light as his kingdom. Prometheus, who stole a fragment of fire, not for himself but for the pygmy race of man.

The face of a devil and of a god.

A face you would not forget.

His.

"I see you know me," said the hooded figure. "Never mind. I'm keeping your heart and the interest accruing therefrom."

"Give it back," pleaded Black.

"Not until . . ."

"Yes?"

"Not until . . ."

"Goodbye."

Black yelled. "No, don't ever say goodbye! Tell me, what must I give?"

But he was not to know what the ransom was, for he awoke with Phyllis shaking him and saying, "Dick, Dick, wake up! You're having a nightmare!"

Her face was white in the moonlight streaming through the open door of their hut. For the flicker of an eyelid he thought her features melted so that they became a strange and yet not unattractive amalgam of the face beneath the hood and of her own. Then the impression was gone, no more substantial than the moonlight itself, and he did not recollect it for a long time thereafter.

2.

Richard Black seldom had trouble making a swift transition from deep sleep to thorough wakefulness. Yet now, for a brief interval, he forgot that he was no longer upon Earth and had not been for twenty years.

Or for, perhaps, an even longer time.

How much longer?

He didn't know. He didn't even know where he was.

He was in his hut upon a hillside of The Valley, close to The River.

Some said that The Valley was Heaven.

Some said, no, this is Limbo.

Others remarked that it was just plain Hell.

A few claimed scornfully that any fool could see that it was none of these, that all of mankind now lived upon a Terrestrial-type planet that revolved around a Solar-type

star in a universe that obeyed physical laws exactly like those experienced on Earth.

But, said those who believed this world was Hell or Heaven or Limbo or Purgatory, how do you explain that you were once dead and we were, too, and now we are alive again and young again and living in The Valley along the banks of The River?

Well, there were explanations for that, quite scientific explanations. You could take your choice of the supernatural or the materialistic.

Phyllis' low, slightly gravelly voice said, "For heaven's sake, Dick, wake up. Were you dreaming of the Great Cry again?"

He sat up and folded his knees in his arms and said "No, not this time."

He told her of his dream. While he did so, he watched her intently. Phyllis McBairn had been, in Earthlife, a practising psychologist, and she would try to analyze the components of his nightmare. He had never had much respect for the intelligence of women, but he now realized that he had lacked the correct information about them and that, during his times, they had not been given much chance to display their I.Q. He thought highly of Phyllis' keen brain because she had proved that she could match him in many areas of accomplishment and in others could beat him. Of course, she had had a better education in those fields. Science in the twentieth century had progressed much further than it had in the late Victorian period, and he had died decades before she was born.

"This figure said, '*You owe for the flesh*'?" she asked. She paused a second. "Have you ever read *Moby Dick*, Richard? By an American named Herman Melville? He was a contemporary of yours?"

"Not at all."

"Well, *Moby Dick*'s main character is a New England whaler, a Captain Ahab, a furious, intense, paranoiac man whose obsession is the killing of a certain white whale. The whale, Moby Dick, is actual and symbolic, and Ahab's lust

to slay it is depicted in terms both physical and metaphysical And he is proud, proud as the devil."

She hesitated and then said, "As proud as you, Dick And that," she hastily added with a slightly nervous giggle, "is saying something.

"Anyway, during one of the more dramatic scenes in the book, the one-legged Captain Ahab is cursing because he has to depend upon the ship's carpenter to make him a new limb of ivory. And he cries—he never talks in a conversational tone, you know, but always cries or shouts or bellows—'Oh, Life! Here I am, proud as a Greek god, and yet standing debtor to this blockhead for a bone to stand on! Cursed be that mortal inter-indebtedness which will not do away with ledgers I would be free as air; and I'm down in the whole world's books. I am so rich and yet *I owe for the flesh* in the tongue I brag with'"

He said, "What are you driving at?"

"Oh, you're annoyed," she said "Please don't be I wasn't implying that you were another monomaniac Ahab or that your drive to penetrate to the headwaters of The River was comparable to his mad chase after the white whale."

"Oh, now, weren't you?"

"Let's not argue about this, Dick Not so early in the morning. You know that I've long ago given up arguing that we should remain in Theleme and finish our work here. Where you go, I go That was settled, and you know it.

"Anyway, I was going to say that every human being that was ever born had become bones and less than bones, dust and less than dust. Yet Somebody or Something has recreated the bones and clothed them with flesh and set them down in this Valley Why or how or by whom this was done has not been told us."

"I'm aware of all that."

"Twenty years ago to the day," she continued, "twenty Valley years, that is, all of humanity—with the exception of idiots and children under five awoke to find itself naked and alive upon the banks of The River That was the day of the Great Cry, the day that a single shout arose from the

throats of the billions scattered up and down The Valley, a great cry compounded by many different emotions, yet, underlying all, the shock of horror For no one, no matter how he'd affirmed it during his lifetime, had really believed that he'd rise again."

"Phyllis," said Richard Black, "I love you very much. But sometimes I wonder why. The only thing worse than a man who can never get to the point is a woman "

"All right, all right The point I'm getting at is that many of us, I think, have a frustrated gratitude complex We know we owe for the flesh, for a second chance at life, but we don't know whom we should thank We want to know, and the whole problem bothers us very much So . . "

"And so," he interrupted, "I want to pay up, but I can't And this gives me a nightmare which I wouldn't be able to explain if I weren't so extremely fortunate as to have as a hutmate a woman who had a master's degree in psychology, and . . ."

"Dick! You actually sound mad!"

"Hardly. It's just that I do become a little irked because I'm so much in debt to you After all, you've been my teacher so long."

"And now," she said with an unexpected flash of anger, "you think you've wrung me dry of all I can teach you! Is that it?"

He did not answer She rose and began putting on her clothes white bra and panties, a light yellow blouse, a kellygreen skirt that fell halfway between ankle and knee, and a red kimono with golden dragons

He put on his shorts and kimono and then stepped outside their hut She followed him and stood by his side Her arm went around his waist, and she slid around him until her cheek rested against his chest The top of her dark chestnut hair came no higher than his chin She was small but very well built and did not at all give the impression of being doll-like or fragile.

"I'm sorry I flared up at you," she murmured "I don't know what's got into me lately Tension, I guess Worrying about Murel and about getting the boat built in time "

Absently, he patted her shoulder and said, "That's all right, Phyl." He was looking intently towards the east, where The Valley began to make the curve that took The River out of sight in that direction. The peaks of the mountains were haloed with the gold of dawn, and the air in the lower parts of The Valley was just beginning to turn from the silver given by the moon to a grey pearl. That sight was a familiar one to him, for he almost always rose before the sun. But he had been struck by something he'd not thought of for years, and that was the silence of The Valley. Aside from the voice of man, there was no life anywhere that could lift up a cry to the skies above The River. All was dumb, silent except for the sound the wind made as it rushed over them. No dog, no cock, no sparrow, no fly buzzing in the window. All was tongueless.

There was no "bloom and buzz of confusion." There was silence and a poverty of variety; only man himself and a small fish in the waters of The River and, on the banks and the plain and the hills, a tall pinelike tree, a longbladed grass, and a bamboolsh plant. And that was all, unless you wished to count the invisible bacteria which worked for the decay of dead flesh. Nor could there be many of those, for bacterial disease was unknown in The Valley. It was a sterile place, sterile in more than one respect.

Unconsciously somber, he gathered in all that could be seen of The Valley with one sweep of his black eyes.

"Lord and master of all you survey," teased Phyllis.

Not entirely unpleased, he grinned back at her. She was, in one sense, correct. Everything that he could see upon the northern bank *was* his. The hill upon which he stood, the other two smaller hills between himself and the mile-long plain, the so-called City, the Black Castle, the Trade Mart, the wharfs, and the *River Comet*, that almost-completed boat that bulked so huge on the banks, his pride, his unique paddlewheeled steamer. His also were the many huts that dotted the hillside and the plain, the blockhouse behind him which guarded the pass into the mountains, and, beyond the pass, The Falling Star Mine, the only source of metal, as far as he knew, in this whole world.

His also were the people who lived upon this ten mile

stretch of the great curve of The River and who called themselves citizens of the democracy of Theleme

Democracy? Yes, it was It was probably the nearest approach to one that had ever existed Yet he knew that he exercised such a control over it that his own people—and others along The River—called him, behind his back, King Richard the First.

Well, let them. It was not his fault that circumstances had forced him to wield more power than he theoretically should The survival of Theleme had demanded that he do so. Once the pressure was gone, he'd give up his temporary authority Maybe he'd do so before then, if the *River Comet* were finished soon.

And why, he thought, shouldn't he have more to say about Theleme than anybody else? It *was* his He'd fought and killed to possess it and to hold it and to build it up He'd prospected for and found The Mine during the Year of the Comet and dug into the mountainside for the meteoric iron and built the Black Castle and written the charter for the Commonwealth of Theleme and directed the building of the *River Comet* and organized his army and created the Missing Persons' Agency, and .

"Dick," said Phyllis' voice, seeming to come from a great distance, "do you want to exercise before we go down?"

"Rather," he said. He removed his kimono, spraddled his legs, and began touching his toes with his fingers Three hundred of those, then three hundred kneebends

Phyllis went back into the hut where she tidied up She rearranged the bed, which crouched in one corner of the one room building The bed itself consisted of uprights and frame made of bamboo, a netting of woven grass, and over that a thin mattress and blankets, all made of the ubiquitous longbladed grass She swept the dirt floor with a broom fashioned from a bamboo pole and rather limp twigs Long before Black was halfway through his three hundred pushups, she had finished her housework

When he rose, sweating and panting and flexing his biceps to get the stiffness from them, he said, "You up to a bit of a bath?"

She winced. "I hate to think of that cold, cold creek water. Can't we wait until noon?"

"Nonsense We've no time then, you know Let's go in The River, then."

He put on his scarlet slacks and his canary yellow kimono, fastened on a belt of grass, and stuck a naked saber through it. Into the front of his belt he put a long two edged knife He draped his robin's-egg blue shirt over his arm, and with his left hand he picked up his grail by its handle In his right he gripped the long iron cane that he was never without and that had become his trademark.

Together, swinging the white metal cylinders of their grails, they walked down the rough path along the hillside

3.

Phyllis said, "Dick, were you scared?"

"Of what? My dream?"

"No, I mean, were you scared when you woke up on the banks twenty years ago today? One moment, you'd been an old man dying. The next, a young man and in a strange un-Earthly place Did you think you were dreaming? Or were you frightened because you thought you'd really gone to Hell and you supposed the devils would come swarming over you in a minute?"

"Yes, I was frightened. Very much so But if the devils had come leaping after me, they'd have had a fight on their hands I was resolved to behave no differently in Hell than I had on Earth I'd go down battling "

"I'll bet you would have, too," she said "You'd have given Old Nick himself a bloody nose and pulled his tail in the bargain. But, Dick, *I* was scared, horribly scared. You see, despite a bringing-up in one of the Calvinistic sects, I had become, as an adult, an atheist. Then, as I got older, an agnostic I thought hellfire was a device to scare people into being good. And the kind of goodness that results from being frightened into it was no goodness at all. Anybody with half an eye could see that Hate and prejudice and bloodshed were the direct result of such teachings Yes, and

so was the militant atheism of the Marxists the fruit of that medieval doctrine.

"As a result of all my experiences and ponderings on the religious question –I needn't go into the details of how I came to my conclusions—I firmly believed there was no evidence for an afterlife.

"Yet, when I woke up after a plane crash from which I could not possibly have survived, I found that the childhood terrors and teachings had been driven so deeply into my bones that I had not been able to exorcize the deepest of them. For the first hour of my life on the banks, I thought I'd die of a ruptured heart, it raced so fast. And I fully expected demons to carry me off to some eternal torture chamber.

"I was very sorry indeed that I had not believed in the Yahweh of Geneva and in predestination and this and that, and that I'd not gone steadily to church, and that I'd laughed at many of the things the minister said when I did go or became disgusted at the hypocrisies of the pillars of the church, and I repented of my few adulteries and what I'd once said to my father when I was eight.

"Then, I met a man who was in a like state. Only, he was grieved that he had forsaken the ways of his fathers and had taken to eating forbidden foods and neglecting to go through certain ceremonies. Never mind what his abandoned faith was. His story was similar to many, though his religion would have differed from theirs.

"It's enough to say that when I talked to him and to others who also told their tales of contrite panic, I began to see that none of the stories we'd been told as children could be true. Otherwise, we'd not all have been there.

"And then, when I met those who were *outraged*, yes, *outraged*, *indignant*, up in arms, *screaming* with fury, *gnashing* their teeth and *pulling* their hair because they'd been put in the same category as the rest of mankind, *they* the *pure*, the *devout*, I laughed and laughed. It was too good a joke not to enjoy.

"From that time on I accepted this life, content to live

from day unto day and see what floated by on the waters of time."

He said, "As you know, Phyl, I'm far from content, and I'm not allowing the waters to float by. Instead, I believe that this world, being of obviously artificial workmanship, points to physical beings who, though sentient and powerful, are capable of making mistakes And a good detective will be able to see certain clues they're bound to leave behind them and to track them down Somewhere in all this set-up there is a pattern If we can resolve it, we'll find out just why we've been placed here. Some day we'll know the reason for this Valley and the grails and the resurrection Some day . . ."

"Maybe. Did we ever find the cause for our being on Earth? No, we didn't Then why should we think that our life along The River will be any less a mystery? All we ever knew or all we know now is that we were transported free of charge from one place to another That is, if it was free How do we know we're not paying? Perhaps the fee is our suffering and bewilderment? Perhaps some entities inconceivable to us feed upon our pains or our pleasures or both?"

"P'raps," he said, and he quoted,

"Who pass through Life like caged birds,
The captives of a despot will;
Still wond'ring How and When and Why,
And Whence and Whither, wond'ring still."

"Fitzgerald—Khayyam?" she said

"My quatrain, written eight years before *The Rubaiyat.*"

"I read your biography, but I never got around to your poetry. I was too busy, I had too much to do"

"When we get time," he said, "I'll recite it to you It wasn't, really, great poetry, but it did anticipate Fitzgerald—wonder where the dear chap is now?—and some were kind enough to say my work was as good as his. But I received almost no recognition for any of my verse"

She ignored the very faint tinge of bitterness in his voice.

"That's another thing," she said. "This time business Here we are, with no need to worry about food or shelter,

with all the leisure we could use, yet we rush from dawn to dusk to do tasks that just aren't necessary. I've lived with you twelve years, yet this is the first time I've heard a word of your poem. Why don't we take life a little easier?"

He shrugged and said, "The Valley throngs with loafers. As for me, I work because I wish to. Also, I s'ppose, because I must. I have to find out, if not the *why*, at least the *how*, of things."

"Yes, I know. I'm a little busybody myself. But," she added plaintively, "I would like a trifle more time to enjoy this life. After all, the day is only eight hours long, and that doesn't give you much time to do anything. And with our feeble means of illumination, we can't work at night."

"When Murel is defeated, we'll coast for a while."

"Oh, sure. Then we begin the voyage up The River, and our work starts all over again."

She reached up and pulled his head down and kissed his swarthy cheek.

"Dick, you want to know whose fingers are pulling the strings from behind the scenes. Yet, you don't even know *me*."

"P'raps, if I did, I'd lose interest in you."

She giggled and said, "Oh, I'd always keep back something."

He looked sharply at her, but she gazed back with eyes of a guileless greyblue.

They were silent for a while as they reached the foot of the slope and walked through the little valley between the two smaller hills. Once upon the mile-wide plain, they began threading through a disorderly maze of wattlewalled, mudplastered, thatchroofed dwellings. Now and then a man or a woman, each of whom looked no more than twenty-five years of age, stepped from a hut and greeted them. Several, despite the chill, were unselfconsciously nude. All, however, carried a weapon in a belt and a grail in hand.

Phyllis said, "If pennies existed, I'd give you one for just a word from you. One tiny word."

He gave her an annoyed look because he knew she was well aware he didn't care to be interrupted when he was

thinking But he replied, "Did you hear the drums last night?"

"No. What did they say?"

"Murel's galley left his capital at midnight It should be here by tomorrow noon My MPA-man asked the captain where he was going, but he didn't reply However, the galley is flying the flag of truce somebody's white shirt so I suppose that 'King' Murel is sending a proposal that Theleme join his kingdom."

"Or else?" she asked.

"Or else."

4.

No one knew how long The River was The greatest estimate was forty million miles, but few believed this possible, even when the more incredible miracles of the grail and of resurrection occurred every day.

It was certain, however, that this particular section of the stream was along the equator, for a man standing in the Trade Mart beneath the hot sun at high noon cast no shadow whatever at any time of the year It was also surmised that The River was a sine wave following the line of the equator It curved back and forth across the line as regularly as if it were drawn on paper by a mathematician and the crest of each wave was twenty miles from the crest of the next.

The mathsharks in Theleme pointed out that a sine wave was twice as long as the straight line it followed Therefore, they said, if this planet's equinoctial circle were about twenty-five thousand miles in length which seemed reasonable from certain rough measurements, then The River must be fifty thousand miles long Provided, that is, that it began and ended at the same place upon the equator But, inasmuch as there were plenty of people who had come from regions of The River that had obviously been in far northern and southern latitudes the purely equatorial picture was discarded

From what had been learned from those who had been far up or down The Valley, it was known that The River

was, on the average, a half a mile across. Occasionally, as if for the sake of variety, it broadened into a lake. Theleme was along one of these, for here the channel expanded to a width of a mile and a half for a stretch of ten miles. Officially, it was named Theleme Lake, but the popular tendency was to call it the Black Sea.

The man after whom the lake was named, and his hutmate, came down out of the little hills at the foot of the towering and unscalable mountains. They began crossing the milewide and very flat plain that ran on each side of The River's banks, everywhere. It was a day like almost every day in The Valley. The sun was well up, the bright air was beginning to turn warm, hastening towards the climax of noon, an estimated ninety degrees Fahrenheit. A breeze still ruffled the waters and broke it into a thousand little mirrors. On the far southern banks could be seen brownskinned people with straight blueblack hair. Many were standing or squatting about smoky pinewood fires. Some were paddling about the lake in dugouts or canoes, looking for a place to drop their fishing lines.

Upon the Thelemite side was a long sandy beach, and here some hardy persons had undressed and plunged into the chill waters. Phyllis said, "Last one in is an Indian." She raced ahead of him, even though she knew he would continue his same swift but calm stride. Long before he was upon the beach, she had put down her grail and saber, dropped her clothes on the white sand, and had run squealing and splashing into the stream. When he joined her, he was greeted with a giggle and dash of spray in his face.

Perhaps it was the sudden shock, perhaps it was the result of the mounting tension of the past four weeks. He did not know, but he did know that this harmless, if slightly painful, descent of cold liquid angered him. There had been a time when he would have enjoyed it, but that time was gone. Now he felt a desire to take out upon her some of the bottled-up resentment towards her. He leaped forward just as she was diving away, and he grabbed her shoulders and held her under water until he thought she was close to the limit of her breath. Then he released her.

She rose sputtering and gasping painfully, her eyes large with panic and her hands clutching his arms for support

"My God, Dick, what were you trying to do? Drown me?"

"Just teaching you a lesson," he said, grinning. "You know that stuff is deuced cold until the arm warms up."

"I think you bruised my shoulders," she said, searching his face for a sign of an emotion she could translate. "If I didn't know better, I'd think you were mad. Now what did I do?"

"Just what I said. That's all."

"But, Dick, you were never angry about that before. What's got into you?"

"Forget about it," he said, and he dived away and swam around until he thought she would have time to conclude that this was a touchy subject.

Indeed, it was, for he did not know what had made him react in such a manner. Her little acts that once pleased him now only irritated him.

He swam back to where she stood hipdeep, a cake of soap in her hand and a puzzled and hurt look upon her face. He took the soap without a word and scrubbed her back, then turned and waited for her to do the same for him. She rubbed the cake on his back and then scraped the little rolls of dirt with her fingernails. Stoically, he endured her sharp diggings, for he knew she was trying to get him to yelp. Lately she'd been doing that whenever she was displeased with him, which seemed to be frequently, and he, like an utter ass, had refused to say anything about it. One word from him would end it, yet he could not utter it.

And, as usual, he won out, for she suddenly stopped raking his skin and said, "Oh, this is ridiculous! Look, Dick, we're going to have to settle this. I, for one, am through behaving like a child, and I'm exhausted from pretending there's nothing wrong between us. So I propose that we thrash this out tonight. After we go to bed, we can have a long talk. What do you say?"

"Dekanawidah and his braves are coming over for a party tonight," he said. "We'll be up rather late."

"Late or not, what about it?"

"Very well."

She cupped water in her palms and poured it over his soapy shoulders.

"I feel better about it already," she said, happily "Everything's going to be all right. As long as you love me, I'll get along, and the world will be a fine place."

He refrained from stiffening, but it was an effort

Well, she'd named what was troubling him, what he did not have courage enough to ask himself

"We'd better get out," he said. "The councilmen'll be eating breakfast."

They waded out and dried themselves with their kimonos They did so without that sense of wonder which they had at first felt when they had marveled about the mystery of the cloth's properties: how it never wore out, how it managed to reject so well the dirt and sweat and stink of its owner's body and how it would, if brought into close contact with his wet skin, repel the water so that it raced off like drops of mercury on a tilted table top

Phyllis combed her short hair and stuck several pins fashioned from fishbones into it, and then put on two earrings These were made from empty lipstick cases. After that, she completed the morning's ceremony by rouging her full lips

"There," she said, dropping the gold spiral lipstick case into her kimono pocket, "do I look nice?"

"As nice as you'll ever look," he said, laughing and pulling her into his arms She seemed so fresh and pretty and eager to kiss him that he forgot the tensions that had lately marred their life And she responded with all the softness and sweetness she was capable of as if she, too, had forgotten.

Yet even in the midst of the embrace he could not lose himself enough Things were not as they had once been

Phyllis leaned back and said, "You must really love me, Dick, else how could you have allowed yourself to be changed so much? Don't you remember how, when I first met you, you would have thought yourself made foolish if you had kissed a woman in public? Yet here you are,

openly embracing me without worrying about whether or not you're being ridiculous. Quite a change, I'd say. And it shows that you really love me."

"Well," he said, "the public beach really is no place to become sentimental, and if I've kissed you here, it's because I wanted to do so, and in Theleme one may do as one wishes. But one shouldn't carry it too far, you know."

She laughed. "For heaven's sake, Dick, I'm not asking you to go to bed with me on the beach!"

They picked up their grails and began walking towards the Castle. She said, "I know I'm no raving beauty, so tell me, honestly, Dick, how is it I've managed to keep you? You're a wonderful and a famous man. You could go up and down The River and find Cleopatra and Lucrezia Borgia and Mary, Queen of Scots, and Rita Hayworth and Sappho and Aspasia and the Dark Lady of the Sonnets, and I don't know how many famous and marvelously beautiful women. It'd be more in keeping with your character if you did. You were the greatest explorer of your time; you didn't like to stay in one place long, you certainly did not spend much time with your wife. Yet you've been living by my side for twelve years as faithfully as if we'd been married in church. More faithful, I might say, when I consider some of my Earthly husband's doings or when I think of my own infidelities there.

"I'm very happy, even in this Inferno. "I am—" she giggled—"having a hell of a good time. I've been faithful to you, too. There's no other man like you. But, seriously, Dick, why did you pick me as your hatmate?"

"I suppose because I liked you very much, and then I fell in love with you. I respected your brain and your education, and I soon found out that you had much to teach me. Indeed, you were a sort of a Tartar, for you insisted on reforming me as much as you could, remember? You talked me out of my anti-Negro prejudices—or, rather, you gave me indisputable facts which changed my concepts. And you wrecked some of my superstitions, all of which, though, were based on Victorian ignorance or scientific misconceptions."

"You still won't ever say goodbye to anyone," she said "That's one tabu you've not been able to overcome."

"It's been too deeply driven into the bone," he said. "But it's harmless Anyway, we were talking about why I chose you. In the first place, all those women you mentioned, while undoubtedly beautiful, are probably not much more so than you Second, most of them, I suspect, would be rather difficult to live with.

"The first eight years of my wandering like a lost Lazarus along The River's banks, I looked for an answer to what had happened to me and to, as far as I could surmise, all of humanity. Equally important—I've never hidden this from you, Phyl—was my search for Isabel. Both those quests took me a long way and a long time before I realized how futile they were. Even if my wife—or I should say ex-wife, since there is no marriage or giving in marriage in heaven or hell, whichever this may be—even if my ex-wife were still in that section of The Valley that seems to be devoted largely to English-speaking Victorians, I'd have less than a hundred million to one chance of finding her During those eight years I saw, literally, millions of men and women Yet, though I had a certain amount of fame on Earth and had known quite a few people, I met only thirteen whom I recognized. Think of it! Thirteen!"

At that moment he was interrupted by a high thin apologetic voice that yet had a peremptory quality.

"Mr. Black! One moment, please, of your valuable time!"

Black scowled and said, "What is it, Borbich?"

Fyodor Borbich was a short and slight man with an enormous head Though he was, like everybody else, at a physical age of twenty-five, he looked much older Continual and violent storms of emotion had eroded his face until it resembled that of the wind-and-sand-scoured Sphinx

Below the massive arch of his forehead were large and protruding ears with thick and heavy lobes His eyes were deepsunken, their pale blue shadowed by more than the overhang of his brows His nose was a peasant's, blurred and blunt His mouth was pouted with a curious mixture of sensuality and sorrow His cheeks and temples were in-

dented points and counterpoints that suggested the discord within him.

The surprising thing about his face was that, in repose, it was dull and colorless, the countenance of a hundred million tired and hungry Slavs who had once tilled the soil of east Europe. Yet when it was animated, as now, it leaped out at you and made you unable to look away. It bore the look of a man who had been living all his life in Hell.

Translation from Earth to The Valley was, for Borbich, only a train-ride from Minsk to Pinsk.

Borbich, in response to Black's tone, jumped as if stung. He waved his hands apologetically and said, "I know this is rather early, Mr. Black. Before breakfast, as it were, and that you have a right, yes, a perfect right, to be irked with me. But, Mr. Black, believe me, what I have to say should be said at any time of the day or the night and should be well received at any time. It concerns your safety, the safety of all this community—indeed of all The Valley. But I do not mean by that just your material and fleshly safety. No, I mean something beyond that. The ultimate safety. The reason you and I and Phyllis there were put here in The Valley."

Black spoke harshly, "Get to the point, man!"

Borbich nodded his great head so fast that it looked as if it would come off his thin neck, and his voice rose in pitch.

"I am, I am! Patience, Mr. Black, patience. After all, we've eternity, you know. All the time in the world, there's no denying that."

"In that case," said Black, "what's the hurry? Present what you have to say to the meeting of the General Council."

Borbich smiled a sad and, at the same time, a deeply cynical smile. His small pale eyes seemed to shrink in on themselves.

"It is well known that if you want anything done in Theleme, you had better make sure that King Richard agrees with you. Then you'll have no trouble with either the Special or the General Council."

Black stopped so suddenly that Phyllis bumped into him. He raised his clenched fist.

Borbich peered with alarm at the upraised hand and stepped back, his palms lifted up in protest. Nevertheless, his fleshy lips still carried their cynical twist.

"No, no, Mr. Black, you misunderstand me! I didn't mean to offend, I spoke carelessly. I only echoed what some of your fellows say. And it was with no intention of disparaging. *Pas du tout! Pas du tout!* However, remember the basic principle upon which you founded the state of Theleme, Mr. Black *Do what you wish.* And its second law, *Though it hurts, be completely honest.* It's true, though, that practise has shown that it's impossible to carry out those precepts, isn't it, Mr Black? But I'm straying, straying I meant to beg your pardon for what was, after all, an honest slip of the tongue."

"I know very well what you meant," said Black, his swarthy face darkening even more. "And don't try any of your dishonest tricks on me. Slip of the tongue, indeed!"

He shook his walking stick in the man's face and advanced His face was set into a mask of animal fury, an aspect calculated to inspire fear in Borbich They were well suited for the intention, for even in repose his features caused an unconscious respect in those around him

So concentrated was he upon Borbich, however, that he did not see that the fellow was backing into an obstacle on the ground This was a twelve foot long archiepiscopal cross, a thick beam of pine crossed by two parallels, the topmost of which was shorter than the lower bar Borbich had borrowed some iron tools and, with two of his disciples, had gone up into the hills and there cut down a tree and from it fashioned the symbol of his church After much labor, the three had dragged it down into the Trade Mart, where it had lain since yesterday Borbich had not as yet received permission from the General Council to erect it, and, theoretically, was not supposed even to have brought it onto the Mart.

Nevertheless, he had done so And now, as he retreated from Black, he stumbled backwards over its butt and fell

heavily upon his back. Though gasping from a loss of wind, he rolled quickly and began to rise to his feet. Then, seeing the hard point of the iron cane shaking under his nose, he threw himself down again and wrapped his arms around the beam of the cross as if it would give him protection. His fingers dug into the wood, and he bent his head back to stare up at the Englishman. His pale eyes were wide, and he protruded his lips in an expression half-sullen, half-aggressive.

Black halted above him, his cane raised as if to strike, his eyes dark with joy.

But at that moment Phyllis' voice, very calm, came from behind him.

"Dick, why don't you listen to what he has to say? And for heaven's sake, control your temper. Can't you see he'd love it if you struck him?"

"That's true, that's true, Miss McBairn," gasped Borbich, his eyes bulging as if from an internal explosion. "Indeed, it may be that I've been asking him to strike me, for once that is done, we have secured some sort of communication, some contact whose end-result may be happy. But, so far, Mr. Black and I have existed in two voids between which there has been no intelligible speech. What I say goes astray; what he says . . ."

Black lowered the cane. He had had no intention of using it but he had no prejudice against making a point with it. He said, gratingly, "Borbich, p'raps I appear to you to dislike you with an intensity all out of proportion to your offense. So, at least, it seems to you. But not to me. For if what you represent becomes a powerful force in this community, then my fellow-workers may be dissuaded from the project on which we've been working these past twelve years. Everything I've fought for will come to nothing. *And I won't allow it!*"

Borbich rose, warily eyeing the cane, and he said, "Mr. Black, all I ask is a chance to expound my principles—those of the church I represent—the church of true humanity—the Church of the Second Chance."

"You'll get your chance," said Black. "But it just so hap-

pens that Theleme is on an emergency standing, and we've no time to consider what you have to offer. After Murel is defeated, we can take up your case In the meantime, I suggest that you cease taking things into your own hands."

"But, Mr. Black, that is exactly what you would do And a very admirable trait, too."

"P'raps," replied Black, and he strode on

"Dick, Dick," asked Phyllis, "what's so wrong with him that you should act this way?"

"P'rcisely, it's this!" he snapped. "Borbich, the meek and the timid, represents a greater danger than the blustering and blood-thirsty Murel Murel stands for a howling savagery, for exploitation of one's fellow, for an absolutely uninhibited release of one's lusts, no matter who is hurt All the cardinal sins. Borbich, on the other hand, preaches gentleness, understanding, forgiveness, love, unconditional pacifism, and so on All the cardinal virtues, and all very well But he has some crackpot theory that, by living up to a certain code of ethics, we'll somehow escape being imprisoned forever in this Valley, that we'll be free of our bodies, of our flesh, and go on to a higher, completely spiritual, non-material plane.

"I've no objection to his thinking thus if he wants to. But if he succeeds in his plans to the extent of converting a slight majority of Theleme's citizens, he will wreck what we've built.

"The Mine will be closed up because we already have everything we need for sustenance and comfort, so why waste our time trying to build a technology? Why make luxuries that will interfere with the contemplation of our navels?

"Also, the Missing Persons' Agency will no longer be allowed to give bonuses of alcohol to those who report discovery of ores in the mountains A few days ago a man reported—via drum, of course—that he'd located a small deposit of copper about two thousand miles up The Valley I authorized him a reward of sixty ounces of whiskey, to be delivered when the find was verified And I heard that Borbich preached against that as an example of misuse of the

grail He said we should not spur people on to prospect for us by appealing to their baser desires."

"Well," said Phyllis gently, "he is right, theoretically."

"We don't give these people a steady supply of liquor When their bonus is exhausted, they have to depend solely on their grail's supply Moreover, we of Theleme are sacrificing our own liquor supply in the meantime Remember that we give four out of every five ounces to the General Fund so that we may have alcohol to barter."

"I know that," she said. "But he claims that we might stimulate a man's alcoholism so much that he'll then turn to stealing other people's."

"That's their problem We're not nurses, and it's not as if we were running dope However, that's not all Borbich objects to. He'd tear down the *River Comet* because it would be a source of spiritual pride to us, inasmuch as we'd then have a practical control of the waterway And also because it'd encourage us to expend much more of our time on technology.

"And, last but far from least, he'd have us throw our weapons into The River We'd supinely invite Murel and his beasts to do their worst, because we'd believe that even if he murders the lot of us, we'd merely pop up some other place along The River, there to spread the good seed of the Church of the Second Chance.

"And if he doesn't kill us, but merely enslaves us, robbing us of half of our food and all our liquor and cigarettes, so much the better While we slowly starved to death, we might—just possibly might—influence Murel and his fellow-beasts into becoming a little more compassionate, a little more loving They might even become ashamed of themselves, see the sudden and true light, and join the Church Or, if they don't, our example would make the first impression in their hearts."

He paused and then burst out, "Such rot! I'll not have that muck spread around here, Phyllis!"

Cautiously, she replied, "I don't go all the way with him, Dick But I do think we could accept what is worthwhile in his teachings After all, most of what he has to say differs

not at all from Theleme's basic charter A wholesale rejection of Borbich isn't logical. Every man has something to teach us."

"I'm through discussing it!" he said.

And they both fell silent.

5.

Black and McBairn had taken more time than they'd intended They hurried past the dugouts and canoes, past the large pier beside which lay the *Dragon's Tooth,* the ninety-foot long war-galley, and past the two great moles between which towered the *River Comet,* clothed in scaffolding and swarming with workmen. Beyond that was the Council Tree, an enormous pine which grew close to the southwest corner of the Castle. Beneath its branches was the large table reserved for the Special Council.

Most of its members were still eating They greeted the two latecomers and asked them what they'd been doing to keep them so long in bed Black, ignoring their remarks, sat down at the head of the table and opened the lid of his grail He said, "Ah, the gods have dispensed a rather good breakfast today! Coffee, ham, and eggs, and two slices of toast with strawberry jam. And a big juicy pear! Much better than yesterday. I was given that sickening cocoa and a bowl of fruit mixed with some cereal that was mainly sugar and air."

He lifted the deep metal dishes and the paper cartons from their snap-up racks inside the white cylinder and set them upon the table Then he held up the paper package he'd extracted last.

"Your favorite, Phyl. Luckies What've you this morning?"

She dipped into the bottom of her grail.

"Camels. Want to trade?"

"Right you are," he said "I wish that Whoever had built these automatic lunchbuckets had also installed a device to check my personal preferences in food, liquor, and cigarettes Three times a day I must receive what they offer,

willy-nilly, and, if I'm not satisfied, I must spend good time trading for what I do want. Beastly set-up."

A slim redhaired hawknosed youth clad in a white shirt and slacks called from the foot of the table, "Dick, you'd gripe if you were hung with a new rope."

The youth cheerfully waved three big brown cigars at Black.

"Lookee here! Three times a day I find three Havanas reposing on the bottom of my grail. Three is a mystical and lucky number, and multiplied by itself it becomes nine—another cipher of good fortune. And don't tell me it's just chance that I never get anything but those cigars of which I am overfond, while everbody else has to take what they find.

"No, I'm the favored son of the gods, one to be reckoned with, while you, Dick Black, are a non-entity, one of the faceless mob."

Everybody laughed Phyllis said, "It does seem peculiar that Sam's the only one I ever heard of to be so treated."

The youth lit up one of his Havanas and said, "There's nothing peculiar about it. I was born under the tail of a comet—no remarks, please, about star-droppings—and everybody knows that that is a lucky omen. Not that I'm superstitious, you understand. It's just that I'm cautious I won't take the chance of offending a god I know is nonexistent, or one, at least, that isn't here because he stepped into the next universe for a cosmic lunch and'll be back in ten eons or so. Safe water, that's me Easy soundings

"Of course, you might say that a comet is also an unlucky omen. After all, I died when that selfsame skybroom under which I'd been born came sweeping back, seventy years later But I put that down to coincidence—sheer coincidence. As I say, I'm not superstitious Just ignorant. Or is there any difference?"

He leaned back and blew smoke rings.

"Of course, I had to die then It was the dramatic thing to do, you know. Besides, I'd been telling everybody I was going to ride that comet up to heaven as chief pilot, and I couldn't allow people to call me a liar."

He chuckled.

"I never lie."

Black said to Phyllis, "The undeniable fact of Sam's cigars does look like celestial favoritism—or infernal. What's your opinion?"

"I haven't any. It doesn't fit into my theory of how the grails operate."

Black drank some of his steaming coffee and began to cut his ham and eggs with the plastic knife and fork he'd found on one of the racks. Between bites, he said, "Let's see. Your idea was that the grail was an engine which could convert energy into matter?"

Phyllis nodded and looked across the table to Jairus Charbrass for confirmation. He was a twenty-first century spaceship engineer whose knowledge of a more advanced science enabled him, presumably, to back up her theory. However, with his usual reticence, he gave no information unless asked for it.

Charbrass was a handsome, tall, and well-built man with a deeply tanned skin, brassy-bronze hair, and green eyes in which swam flecks of gold, like that German liqueur called Goldwasser. He almost always gave the impression of being lazy; his slightly Mongolian eyelids drooped heavily, and his movements were slow and smooth.

His response to Phyl's questioning look was a mere nod. That was as far as he usually went. To get information from him, a person had to drop a hook into him and pull it out. Yet, his appearance was deceiving, for he could work day and night until his fellows dropped, and he'd be as fresh as if he'd slept a week. And, during purely social occasions, he talked as long as any would listen.

Charbrass was one of the few men about whom Black had not formed a positive opinion. Though the twenty-first centurian had never said so or even indicated by a gesture or expression that he thought so, he gave Black the feeling that he considered himself superior to those who had been born in other times than his.

Black had met him twelve years ago immediately after the fall of the great meteor. He had explored the mountains

looking for it, and he had found Charbrass already on the site, prowling around. There had been a few tense moments after the meeting, for Black had been ready to kill him if he had wished to keep the location of the deeply buried fragments of the falling star for his own profit and use. But Charbrass had been very agreeable and cooperative. And when Black had outlined his plans for mining the meteoric nickeliron, Charbrass had said that he'd be glad to act as the chief engineer for the project. Since then, his skill and knowledge had been invaluable. But he remained an enigma, sociable yet somehow aloof, affectionate yet shrinking, democratic yet aristocratic.

Now, in response to Phyllis' plea to back her up, he smiled fondly at her and said, "Your idea, Phyl, is the only scientific explanation I've heard that will hold water. And I think we may use Occam's razor upon all supernatural theories. As long as the Valley we live in seems to be made of the space-time energy-matter stuff that we knew on Earth, and it obeys the same physical laws, we can be assured we are in the same universe.

"Phyl says that during the 1940's scientists had been able to create matter out of energy. It wasn't much, merely the creation of several atoms out of energy and their attachment to a carbon molecule. But it was a beginning. By the end of the twenty-first century we were able to convert energy chains of carbon molecules, amino acids. I can't say what succeeding generations did, but I suppose they went on to more complex transmutations.

"So, we have your first step in the building of a grail

"Next, Phyl tells me that her century also saw the birth of the electron microscope, which was able to photograph atoms My time had developed this to the point where we could reproduce, in visual form, the inmost structure of matter itself, even the temporary particles born of collisions between sub-atomic units.

"Now, what if the people who came after the 2100's succeeded in developing and combining the two inventions? See, we take this grail—thus."

He held up his cylinder by its handle and turned it back

and forth, the sun flashing off its white and indestructible round, while all fell silent and watched it.

"This glorified lunchbucket," he said, smiling lazily, "is mostly hollow interior. Its walls are very thin But you will notice that it could have a false bottom of about an inch in depth and a foot in diameter. Can you conceive a very minute and exceedingly compact and complex energy-matter converter installed in that space? One that takes in power broadcast from somewhere or directly from sunlight? One that also has the 'photographs' of the molecular structure of the food, liquor, and other articles given three times a day by the grails stored away?"

"Yes, Jairus, I can," drawled Kelly, the darkhaired general of Theleme's regular army, "but why steak one day and ham the next? Golds one morning and Tareytons on another?"

"Phyllis has suggested that there's a sort of electronic 'menu' located in each grail. Also, there would be a device which picks a combination of dishes according to pure chance. It 'spins' and calls out the number of a particular 'list.' Immediately, the little engine goes into operation It delves into its files of 'notched' molecules, its memory bank, locates the sub-atomic prints of each article, converts raw energy into matter which matches the 'photos', and, presto! change-o! lunch is served!"

"Yes," said another, "but why should the owner of the grail be the only one to open it?"

"That could be explained in a dozen different ways," remarked Phyllis "One is that the grail could be attuned to the pattern of brainwaves radiated by the owner As soon as the meal emerges upon the empty dishes, a mechanism operates the minute encephalograph, and the lid is ready to be opened As we know, nobody, including the owner, can, once he's closed the cover, open it until the new contents are formed within."

"That," said Ezekiel Hardy, the captain of the *Dragon's Tooth*, "should be to ensure that your hand is kept out of the grail when the conversion is taking place?"

"You're right," replied Phyllis "Otherwise, if the matter

materialized where your hand was, there'd be an explosion, inasmuch as two things can't occupy the same place at the same time."

Hardy, a New Bedford whaling captain, said, "Somehow, I find it easier to accept a supernatural explanation. It's simpler."

"The supernatural is incomprehensible," said Black, "and that relieves us of the responsibility of thinking about it. It also makes it unchallengeable. I prefer the natural theory. It sets up something we may be able to knock down."

"Don Quixote and the windmill," sneered Hardy

"Mills are not the only thing that run on wind," said Black, his strong jaw clamping so tightly it gave the impression of clanging shut.

Hardy reddened Phyllis, anxious to keep the peace, hastily said, "The scientific explanation also covers our resurrection."

The Chinese sitting beside Phyllis looked up from the bean soup he was spooning from a bowl. He was a stout redcheeked youth whose name was Tsechan At his elbow rested the tall conical hat of woven grass, bent outwards near the tip Wherever he went, he wore that hat, and it was as much his trademark as Black's iron walking stick was his. Several years before he had been killed by a gang that did not care for his liberal political ideals and he had shown up among the Cayuga Iroquois Indians who lived across the lake from Theleme. Though he had been enslaved by them, he had soon talked the sachem, Dekanawidah, into adopting him as a member of the tribe. Not only that, he had married the sachem's great-granddaughter and, in time, become a leader second only to his father-in-law several times removed He had mastered the Iroquois dialect and the English of the people across the waters. At present, he was visiting the Thelemites because he was oiling the diplomatic wheels for a conference between the whites' Special Council and the redskins' chiefs He and Black hoped to form a permanent league between the two peoples, but it would be a slow and tedious process.

Now, though he had been content to listen to matters

about which an eleventh century Chinese poet and statesman could be forgiven for knowing nothing, he said, "You can explain our rebirth, madam?"

"Yes. Postulate a device which is able to photograph the molecular structure of a man from the time he is conceived to the time he dies. From that it is only a step, though a long one, to reproducing that man down to his last electron through means of the energy-matter converter I say that Whoever set us down here along The River has done just that."

Tsechan's eyes were extraordinarily long and bright They grew even more sparkling, and his full red 'sensitive' lips blossomed into wonder

"Just that, madam?"

"That is the only explanation."

"What about our restoration to an unaging youth?"

"The perfected science of geriatrics, Mr Tsechan Or, I should say, of longevity or rejuvenation. Then, there is the fact that we also die in this Valley, only to appear elsewhere in it. What can be done once can be done again."

"How was this 'photography' done? How could men that lived twelve thousand years ago be 'photographed'? Who did it? Why?"

Phyllis laughed and said, "Heavens, Mr Tsechan, I'm sure I don't know That is where my theory falls flat on its face There is, aside from time travel, no explanation I can give And that is too fantastic. I'd prefer not to postulate that."

"And I, too," added Charbrass "I can offer nothing new, but I think that what we *have* been able to reason out should be kept in mind Perhaps, some day, we may find out why we are here."

"Meantime," said Phyllis, "it seems to me that we do have certain clues For instance, the whole set-up of the Valley is anthropocentric, and hints at a certain type of uniform culture attempting to impose aspects of its life upon us Look at the contents of the grail Besides the food, which is a necessity, we get cigarettes, cigars, lipstick, soap, and combs. I can understand the soap But why the smokes

and the liquor and the lipsticks? Doesn't that indicate that our resurrectors are a people who also use them and who consider them as necessary to a halfway-decent and leisurely life?"

"The lipstick keeps up your morale, Phyl," reminded Black.

"True, and I think no one but a human being would understand that. Therefore, I don't think the grails were made by gods. Human hands fashioned them."

"Pardon me, but there is a point I'd like to make," interjected Tsechan. "The taste of this bean soup that I have been eating is very familiar to me. It should be. I invented the recipe for it."

"Aha!" shrieked Phyllis, delighted. "And I'll bet it's been used in China ever since, and whoever built the grails for the Chinese lazari included that bean soup in the electronic menu!"

"Don't forget our clothes," said Black. "Everywhere, throughout The Valley, they have been uniform For the women, bras and panties, blouses and skirts For the men, shorts, shirts, and slacks. For everyone, kimonos. There's been no attempt to tailor the garments according to the nationality or chronology of the individual. Ancient Egyptian Pharaoh, Australian bushman, Elizabethan mariner, Hindu peasant, Eskimo fisher, Trojan hoplite—it made no difference All were given the same type of clothing I wonder if that doesn't indicate that p'raps our unknown benefactors also wear that style?

"Furthermore," he continued, a little vehemently, "there is the mysterious disappearance of our mustaches and our beards Smoothfaced as babies we came into this world, and smoothfaced we've been since. Doesn't that indicate a people who themselves look upon whiskers as an abomination? And who dare inflict their prejudices upon us—willy-nilly?"

Phyllis laughed. "Oh, Dick, will you never forgive them because they robbed you of your fierce-looking mustachioes?"

Sam, the hawknosed youth with the auburn and bushy hair, stood up and waved his lighted cigar as he shouted, "I

say, let the reprobates stand forth! If the goddamned sons of bitches have guts enough to drag us out of our graves and stick us in this miserable Valley, why haven't they the guts to tell us who they are? Why don't they admit their deed?

"Or is it because they regret having resurrected the whole wretched race, and they know it's a bad job that should never have been done, but they don't want to own up to it? And so they've slunk off, hoping nobody'd find us here and expose their redhanded underhanded miserable goddamned lowdown yellowbellied sneaking stinking crime? I say, why don't they reveal themselves? Or are they doing this just for a joke, the high-handed bastards? Just for a lousy joke?"

Nobody bothered to try to calm him down. Sam was liable to get carried away sometimes, there was nothing to do but let him discharge his bitterness through his wild ravings. Usually, he was a cheerful, witty cigarsmoking youth who enjoyed what The River had to offer But, occasionally, something touched off a hidden rocket of resentment, and he exploded all over the place until he ran out of fuel

Sam, seeing that nobody was in the mood for arguing, kicked his grail over and stomped off, chewing on his Havana, his hands locked behind him, scowling from beneath thick rusty brows, looking for a victim he could denounce.

Abruptly, the tension was broken by the distant beating of drums from the west They forgot about Sam as they concentrated on the message from the MPA men stationed in the mountainsides along Murel's territory

6.

"Hickok will be here soon," said Black "P'raps some of you noticed he's been missing for the past two weeks I can tell you now he's been spying in Murellia "

Excitedly talking about the news, the party rose Everybody washed off the white metal dishes in a baked clay tub full of water and then returned the containers to their racks inside the grails. The plastic spoons and forks and knives were washed and wiped and tied into a neat bundle Any

empty cigarette packages were carefully unwrapped, and the papers were pressed out and given to Phyllis. As secretary of the Special Council, she collected and kept an account of discarded paper, whose white sides would be used for writing purposes.

Later, the plastic utensils and the cigarette wrappings and the liquor, minus the ounce each person was entitled to, would be taken into the Black Castle and there put into the General Fund.

Phyllis and Richard picked up their grails and walked towards the tall but narrow doorway of the Castle Just before entering, Black turned and glanced over the green square of the Trade Mart. He saw the Second Chancer, Borbich, talking to a dozen or so people around him. His hands were semaphoring wildly.

Lips curled—there was no one who could look more savagely disgusted than he—Black entered the building. He felt that he'd have to deal severely with the fellow before the affair was over.

He passed through a long hallway twice as tall as a man and with room for four abreast, walked beneath a raised portcullis with many sharp and heavy teeth, and came into the general office room. It was very spacious and was painted with a paint made from ground limestone There were many desks, each enclosed by a bamboo fence

The manager of the Agency greeted him and then handed him a note.

"Well, well," said Black, "so our agent located Dickens? Let's see, who was the fellow who wanted us to find him?"

"Man named Chesterton He didn't say why he wanted to contact Dickens. But he seemed extremely anxious to do so."

"What are we charging him?"

"Service. He's to build and manage an Agency for us until such time as he wants to quit it or we demand another man run it. He was too far off for us to charge the usual one hundred and fifty ounces of liquor Anyway, according to our agent, he didn't look like a man who'd willingly give up all that alcohol."

"Did the agent who found Dickens ask him if he wanted any business from us?"

"Mr Dickens said he was most happy. He can't write novels any more, of course, but he was doing what he's always wanted to do—I'm quoting our agent, Mr Dana, of course—that is, he was traveling with a troupe of entertainers, giving plays and readings from memories of his books Seems Mr Dana was very amused because Mr Dickens had close connections—quite close—with one of the actresses. Can't remember her name, but it seems she was a prominent player for the twentieth century cinema. American, she was. Let me see now, *what* was her name?"

"Never mind, Mr. Johnson."

He walked on. Phyllis giggled. He did not smile at her, as he usually did to show her he shared her amusement. Lately, he had been annoyed by her habit and found difficulty in not expressing his irritation.

Phyllis looked hurt, but he ignored her and walked on Once he stopped to overhear the interview of a client, a redhaired man with a big nose and a prominent adam's apple.

"I was born in '42."

"What century?"

"Why, this one, a' course."

Patiently –"The nineteenth or twentieth?"

"Why, law, Miss, it war 1842, a' course Twenty-one years later I war dead; a Reb shell took off my leg, and I died a' infection. But when I woke up on the banks, I had my leg back, and . . ."

"Yes, sir So I see But this woman you wanted us to find?"

"Laura Mae Iverson, Miss She and I became engaged to get married, but it war this way . . . We couldn't wait, and so when I marched off I warn't sure if she'd have a child . if you see what I mean . sins don't mean nothing here, anyway . saint and sinner all in the same boat . all landed here . . so I'd sure like to locate her, Miss Twenty years I been going up and down, up and down . not that I've not lived with other women, but I quarreled

with the last one, like all the others, and I left and come here when I heard about your Missing Persons' Agency I just can't get Laura Mae out a' my mind, and I'd like to know if we had a kid, and . . ."

Another client was a short dark slim man with a big curly head and an enormous hooked nose.

"Name, please?"

"Isaac Goldberg."

"Time and place of birth?"

"January 26, 1918 Hamburg, Germany."

"Died?"

"Sometime in the fall of 1942. Dachau."

"Did you first appear in this section of The Valley?"

"No. Down The River Among Germans of my time."

"And what is it you wish from the MPA, Mr Goldberg?"

The little man's mouth twisted as it spewed German, a broken and poisonous stream in which one name was uttered again and again.

None of the listeners were surprised or moved Long experiennce had taught them that hatred motivated as many of the searches as did love. And Phyllis was the only one who had ever heard the name of the man that Goldberg longed so intensely to find.

Calmly, the clerk said, "Very well, Mr. Goldberg, we'll do our best. But we can't guarantee success, you know. As I understand it, however, you had located this man once before?"

"*Ja*, and I tortured and killed him as he had once tortured and killed my father and my mother, my sister and her husband, my wife and my son. And I will find him and truss him over the fire again And again, even if it takes all eternity."

"It may very well take that long, Mr Goldberg But that is neither here nor there Now, a few stock questions. Have you ever met a tall blue-eyed blonde Englishwoman named Isabel Black? Or heard of anyone who met her?"

Phyllis' hand, which had been resting lightly on Black's, squeezed suddenly She had never become accustomed to

this routine question which Black directed all his agents to ask, wherever they went.

Goldberg said, "Never."

Her hand relaxed.

"Thank you. Have you ever seen the headwaters of The River? Or known anybody who has?"

"No, but I have met several who have been to River's End. They say it races into a narrow canyon of towering and unscalable cliffsides, and it roars over great rocks that would dash to pieces any boat that tried to float past them. No man has ever launched himself into River's End and come back—alive or dead."

"Thank you. We know that. It is the headwaters that we're interested in."

"I know nothing of that. There is but one thing that I care about."

The little man clenched his fists and glared around the enormous room.

Black and McBairn walked off. Just outside the hospital-ward door, they stopped to light up a cigarette. Phyllis did not say a word about Isabel, though he knew that was uppermost in her mind. Instead, she said, "Goldberg needs help, Dick. He needs it very badly. Otherwise, he wouldn't have spent twenty years in The Valley and not adjusted by now. Twenty years, feeding that monomania with his heart's blood! God! Not that he didn't suffer on Earth, or that I blame him for feeling that way in the beginning. But this is different, Dick. This is The Valley. We have a chance for a really new start, a chance to find some sort of happiness. And did you notice that he never once asked for his lost relatives? Only for the man he wanted to torture? Not that that man didn't deserve it, but, as I said, Dick, he ..."

"Don't be so nervous, Phyl."

She puffed on her cigarette and said, "I am nervous. I have been for several days. Anyway, as I was going to say, how can you possibly find a person who has died *in* The Valley? The pattern of translation almost always locates a person far far away from the place where he died."

"And that has often made me wonder, what will I do if

you're killed? I'd never see you again, and even if I knew that you were alive somewhere, you'd be good as dead to me. And I couldn't stand that, Dick. You're the only man I've really, I mean *really*, loved."

"There are a million you could love just as intensely as you do me, Phyl. And probably will. You and I have eternity ahead of us. What about a hundred years from now? Will we be loving each other as passionately, or will we be weary to death of each other? How many others will we have met by then? Whose arms will we find around us, whose lips will we swear undying love for?"

Hurt, she replied, "Many couples on Earth lived to be ninety or a hundred, and they loved each other to the end."

"That is an untested statement. How many seemingly devoted couples were that way because of habit or because they were old and had no one else to turn to? What if they, like us, had retained undiminished the vitality of the twenty-five year old? Would you have seen those couples spending so many quiet evenings together, nodding and contented? They did not have to resist sexual urges towards others, you know, and they had fallen into a groove of daily living which they didn't have the energy to get out of."

"Dick, sometimes, when you talk the way you do, I wonder if you love me?"

He blinked.

"What does what I've said have to do with that?"

"What? Honest to God, Richard Black, you are the most asinine and stupid and conceited man I've ever seen, and how I could live with you for twelve years is beyond me!"

He grinned and said, "But you were just talking of living for eternity with me."

"Well, that's just a little too long for anybody!"

"Exactly what I said."

She left in a fury. Though he grinned, he could not help being puzzled a little by her behavior. Absently, he traced hieroglyphs upon the whitewashed wall, and, suddenly, traced in their lines the answer. Of course—this was the day her period was to start. And that meant that events that would at other times leave her calm would now strike

the note that set her nerves to quivering. That, plus the coming conflict with Murel, the reminder about Isabel, and her growing uneasiness about his love for her, were enough to cause the unreasonable outbursts of the morning.

He wondered briefly, as he had so often done, about the agents responsible for the sterility of the Valleydwellers Women ebbed and flowed as the moon waxed and waned, and men cast their seed as they always had. Yet, nothing fruitful grew in the dark womb.

Well, he shrugged, they'd probably never find the cause of their barrenness. There were no microscopes so that one might see if the sperm still swarmed in the semen, or if the ovary or the female hormone was healthy or hampered by some subtle agent.

He entered the so-called hospital, a single large room filled with twenty beds. Doctor Winters greeted him. He was short and stocky and had very bright pale-blue eyes, sandy hair, and a ready if slightly mocking smile.

"What's the report today, Joe?"

Winters shrugged and waved his hand elegantly

"We're doing fine So far, no cases of leprosy, typhus, cholera, malaria, polio, elephantiasis, yaws, syphilis, gonorrhea, pyhorrhea, diphtheria, pneumonia, smallpox, measles, meningitis, filiarisis, tapeworm, amoebic dysentery, scarlet fever, typhoid, spider bite, or hangnail "

He chuckled weakly. The joke was, by now, no stronger than water.

Black did not respond. He never laughed out of a sense of politeness He walked through the room past the bamboo beds

"Hello, Wanda, how are you feeling?"

"Not so good, Dick My breast hurts something awful, and all that whiskey the doc gave me doesn't help much "

Cancer No pain-killer except alcohol, and that was limited.

The next bed held a man whose hands were claws and whose back was curved into a question mark

Arthritis.

"Why don't you let the doc kill me, Dick? I'll end up

only God-or-Somebody knows where. But I'll be free of this agony."

"How do you want it? Drowning, stabbing, or a knock on the old bean?"

"Honest, Dick, I wish you could put me in a bag and throw me in the River."

"We'll see what we can do about it."

The next patient was a girl in a straitjacket made of grass ropes. Her hair was wild, her eyes were closed, her lips moved unceasingly, chanting syllables nonsense to all but her, perhaps to her.

Winters said, "Did you get in contact with her lover?"

"One of my agents found him down The River, about five hundred miles."

"What'd he say?"

"He won't come back to her. He likes the woman he's living with now much better."

"He's the only one who can save this girl. If he came back to her, she might snap out of this."

"He won't. He says he won't be chained to a woman he doesn't love."

Black stared moodily at the wretched face and thought of Phyllis. What would she do if he told her he didn't love her?

"Well," said Winters, "you can't blame the man Why should he live with her if he doesn't want to? And if she's crazy, she's the one to blame He's not her doctor. He has his own life. But I wish he would come back long enough to establish some sort of communication with her. If he did, I might be able to take over from there. I have a new technique I'd like to try. Charbrass showed it to me the other day."

"Charbrass?"

"Sure. The Great Silent One I was grateful to him for demonstrating to me a very effective twenty-first century therapeutic attack which makes anything I've ever heard of before absolutely primitive But at the same time I'd like to kick him hard in his big bronzed buttocks for not having told me about it before.

"'Good God, man,' I said. 'I've known you six years, and you knew how much I needed suggestions, how much I ached for more effective techniques. And yet you don't open your trap. How come?'

"And he answers in that lazy way of his, his eyelids drooping, 'Why, doc, you didn't ask me.'"

"He is an engineer. P'raps he thought he didn't know enough of the therapy of his time?"

"He said he only has a layman's knowledge. But it's way ahead of anything I learned in my time."

Black stared intently at the girl.

"Tell me, did she have a record of insanity in her Terrestrial life?"

"Yes. She died in an asylum. When she woke up on the banks, she was sane."

"Whoever translated her straightened her out."

"Yes, that is the case with any injuries, somatic or psychosomatic. They're cured, temporarily, at least."

"Do you know," said Black, "it is a strange thing, but no idiots were translated into The Valley."

"Neither were any children under five. And those women who had died on Earth while pregnant woke up with their wombs empty, their bellies deflated."

"Where did the idiots, the infants, and the embryos go?"

"Search me," said Winters. "That's another of the mysteries of Valley-life. If you think too much about them, you're driven to drink, which is mighty hard to obtain in large quantities, or to insanity, like that poor girl there."

"I suppose that the only way we can straighten her out is to use euthanasia on her."

"Yes. She'll wake up somewhere else, fresh and healthy and ready to start all over."

Black looked across the ward at the arthritic. "Think Charbrass' technique'll work on him?"

"I'm going to try it. Why?"

"Well, I'm thinking about putting this question of euthanasia for our hopelessly ill before the General Council. It's ridiculous to make these people suffer."

Winters rubbed his palms in mock happiness.

"Ah, that would make things so much better. I could bury my failures so much quicker, and I'd not have much to do except set a broken bone now and then or pull a tooth. That'd give me more time to go fishing. Ah, happy Valley, where a doctor may best cure his patients by killing them. Would to God it had been so on Earth!"

Black laughed, and then told him about Goldberg and suggested that he contact him later on with the idea of talking him into taking therapy.

"I understand the man was quite a famous comedian in his time. I think that if that one dark twist in him could be restored to its original shape, he'd be quite a welcome addition to the community. We need singers and jokers and jugglers more than we do chemists or English professors."

Winters nodded. "Yes, deprived of paper and of all means for writing, man has turned again to The Word A good talker is worth his weight in gold, or would be if there were any gold. Anyway, in this world of limited entertainment means, a secondrate vaudeville tumbler is a big shot."

"Well, see what you can do for Goldberg, will you?"

Black turned to go, but Winters pulled his arm.

"Wait a minute, Dick. There's somebody you should meet. A translatee who appeared at dawn on the Trade Mart. I've assigned her to a room in the Castle until she decides where she wants to go. She's willing to help as a scrubwoman until she gets an offer of a better job. Which she will, which she will."

Winters lit a cigarette and luxuriously puffed out smoke, his blue eyes glowing.

"Won't be long before some man asks her to be his hutmate. What a dish, Dick! Crackles and pops with sex Spirit! A *real* woman, if you know what I mean

"Ah, here she is Anne do Celnos herself."

He trumpeted through cupped hands—ta-ra-ta-ra-ta-ra! and he bowed.

7.

Anne de Celnos was short and very curved. She had the

most beautiful chestnut brown hair Black had ever seen, a round face, a glowing tanned skin, cheeks and lips innocent of rouge and naturally bright, a small but eyecatching dimple in her chin, and large eyes with irises like black wings. They fanned fire and laughter within her and hurled them at you.

No classic beauty, she was one of those women whose spirit could not be caught by brush or film. Those clumsy tools would have snared nothing but the dullness of the flesh. A portrait of her would have shown only a mediocre, perhaps even an ugly, face. The living eye had to see her, the keen ear to listen, before you could perceive the rare bird that fluttered within her.

Black saw it within the first few moments of their meeting. Reluctant to allow her to go on after only a few words, he kept on talking to her. And, during the flow of her questions about Theleme, he asked her what had caused her death. It was the usual question; everybody talked about their demise in the most casual way or most dramatic manner, depending upon the person.

"Oh, la!" said Anne, "I was glad to get away from that place. There were too many frowning men. We had no time for gay and witty chatter; nothing but black looks and muttered curses and bloodshed right and left. No, not for me."

She had been a sort of Helen of Troy. Hutmate of a self-styled king of a group of seventeenth century Frenchmen, she had run away with a visiting prince from up The River. War between the two states had followed. Meanwhile, her prince's prime minister and his general had made love to her behind the others' back. The minister was plotting assassination, the general wished to kill the prince and minister and make her his mistress.

"What happened then?"

"Oh, I became very tired of those heavyhanded bores who wanted me to swear undying love for them—as if there were such a thing. So, I fled with an opera singer, a baritone. I'm very fond of baritones, you know. They do something to me that tenors and basses can't. But we were caught. And the general strangled me with his own hands."

She felt her soft goldenbrown neck and said, "I'm very thankful that resurrection removes all marks of violence."

He laughed and said, "I am, too, for it would have been a shame to spoil such perfection."

"Thank you, monsieur Black."

She looked hard at him and then said, "Ah, you are one of the ughest men I have ever seen No, don't start. I mean it as the compliment You are ugly, yes, but in a handsome way. You look like a cross between a devil and a god You frighten me—that is, if I could become frightened of a man, I would be—and at the same time you attract me almost—almost, should I say, irresistibly? Tell me, you are, I suppose, living with a woman?"

"Phyllis McBairn. I will introduce you "

"That is good I must meet the woman I have to dislodge."

"You are frank."

"Why not? Even on Earth I was seldom the hypocrite And here there is absolutely no excuse for not being truthful. After my first terror upon finding myself alive again—for I had mocked at the idea of an afterlife, and my time, if you will remember, was famous for burning those who were blasphemous . . ."

"Not in your country, madame," he said."

"True, but the chance always existed But, as I was saying, after I had become used to this Valley, which seemed so poverty-stricken at first glance, I determined that it was richer than Earth in many respects and that I would take advantage of it and that I would act absolutely as I wanted to."

"Welcome to Theleme, your true country," he said, bowing

"How right you are, monsieur. But, as I was insisting, I say what I want, and I do what I want. This policy, I must admit, got me into trouble, but it was because those men *would* take themselves seriously. I told that Jean-Jacques that we would love each other for a while, and then I would get tired of him And he said he'd kill me. After that, I no longer loved him. However, it was not he, but his

general, who choked the life out of me But I paid him back while he was doing it, monsieur Black. I kicked him in *les poires,* and he left off his murder for a while. But after he had recovered somewhat, he resumed his work. Quite successfully, too, I suppose, otherwise I would not now be here."

"We are indeed indebted to the general," said Black. "His loss is our gain."

She thanked him and asked more questions

Black explained his Missing Person's Agency, how it extended for three thousand miles up and down the Valley, how he received news from his various agents through the signal-drum system he'd set up, and how he hoped eventually to influence this English-speaking part of The River through means of the agencies.

"Ah," she said, "then you hope that, some day, your MPA will become EMPIRE."

He laughed and said, "*Pas exactment,* mademoiselle There will be no Emperor. The people will rule themselves It will be, perhaps, closer to democracy then any government yet conceived."

"Ah, monsieur, you do not look like a fool. You really believe the mob is capable of self-rule?"

"Here, yes It is not like Earth Here we have all the time there is to correct our mistakes . . ."

"Or to compound them."

"True, but here in The Valley, we have a potentially stable citizenry. We do not get old and ossified and unable to adapt Our minds should, theoretically, be as flexible as our veins and arteries Nor do we have the problem of educating children into the facts of life nor of having to allow them to make the same mistakes we did

"Here every man becomes old only in experience Surely, with his mistakes hitting him in the face time after time, he will learn.

"*Monsieur* looks like the born cynic, yet he is not He has more faith in man's ability to learn than I had thought he would As for me, *mon Dieu!* I do not think man will break his stupidity upon the anvil of eternity I look, rather, for

him to break himself to pieces But his ideas, his preconceived notions, never. He would rather die than do that; he *will* die. He will perish a thousand times, and he will come back to life a thousand and one times, and he still will not depart from the ways of his fathers."

"I hope you are wrong, mademoiselle. You paint in black."

"You are Black, not I."

"I am not as dark as depicted."

There was a pause, and then he spoke with an inspiration he could not combat and indeed had no desire to.

"This afternoon I'm going to inspect the blockhouse that guards the pass to the Mine. Perhaps you'd care to come with me. You'll get a good view of Theleme from the hills, and I'll be able to explain much of what we've done and are trying to do."

"I'd love to, *monsieur.*"

"I'll meet you at the northwest corner of the Mart then. At noon."

When he walked away he did not wonder what it was that had impelled him to invite her so suddenly He knew what he was feeling. It was the same sensation he'd experienced during his early years with Isabel and with Phyllis.

And now it was Anne.

At that moment he saw that Phyl was standing in the doorway and had been watching him for some time. As soon as she knew he saw her, she lost her absorbed expression and said, "Anything else before we go to the office?"

He looked around for Anne to introduce her, but she had disappeared. He felt relieved.

"No."

When they were inside Black's office, Phyllis asked who the woman was. He told her, and she said, "She sounds like a very intriguing babe Is she beautiful?"

"You saw her."

"I mean, do you think she is?"

"She is attractive, but there are a dozen women in Theleme who are more beautiful."

"I thought she was fat."

"Hmm. She's the voluptuous type who, if she were to put on one more pound, *would* be too heavy."

"But she never does?"

"How would I know?"

"You have a keen eye for such things."

"I'm a man. Naturally, I'm sensitive to such things in a woman."

"Is she witty?"

"Yes."

"Laughs a lot?"

"Yes."

"Has a wonderful personality?"

"Yes."

"Stands out in a crowd?"

"Never saw her in one, but she would if there was a crowd."

He sat down behind his desk.

Phyllis took her chair. "Haven't I heard of this Anne do Celnos before?" she asked. "Seems to me I've read about her."

"P'raps."

He lit a cigarette and said, "She lived in the seventeenth century and a little of the eighteenth. She had quite a reputation as a wit, a lover, and the leader of one of the famous French salons of that day."

Phyllis sat up straight at his last words.

"Oh, I know! She was the one who had so many lovers her biographers didn't even bother to count them. A high-class harlot."

"Hardly. She never gave her favors to anybody she didn't like. And, while she accepted gifts, she never let them influence her into going to bed with the donor."

"I still say she was a prostitute."

"You're rather hard in your judgements today, Phyllis. That's not at all like you, you know."

"I don't think I like her."

"You haven't even met her."

"I saw what effect she had on you. That's enough for me."

He turned his head to impress his black gaze upon her greyblue.

She shivered slightly and said, "For God's sake, Dick, don't look at me like that I know I shouldn't be talking this way about her But something has happened to you I can feel it You never had that funny expression in all the years I've known you. Except once That was the day we met. Do you remember it?"

"The expression or the day?"

She tried a smile; it died at the corners of her lips.

"The day, silly That was just after the big fight with the gang of grail-collectors that dominated this side of the lake. You had just killed their leader—funny I can't even remember his name—with a rock Pounded his skull in, remember? And I had held his legs while you sat on him and beat his face to a jelly. I should have been horrified, but I wasn't. I was glad because the brute was dead.

"And when you rose, all bloody and sweaty and dirty, but grinning like a demon, swarthy and fierce-looking, I fell in love with you And you looked at me—that was when you got that funny expression and I knew we'd be sleeping together that night and for many nights to come.

"Of course, that was a highly romanticized and unrealistic feeling. You might have turned out to be just another tyrant, as big a gangster as the one you'd just killed But you weren't And, afterwards, when the glamour and the storybook gilding had been worn off by everyday living, I still loved you More than ever, because I loved you as a *man,* not as a legendary hero."

He said, "I'm not blind. Phyl I can see in what direction you're going You're making an appeal to me through the force of the years we've spent together It's peculiar, too, for never before have you done this I've met other women, very desirable women, and they have made no bones about what they wanted. I could have done so, easily, and I knew that if I had, you would still have kept on living with me, that our life, though not quite as it had been before, would

not be too different with us. But I refused these women because I knew I wouldn't get anything better from them than I could from you—except newness, perhaps. I thought our understanding as man and mate was too good, too rare, to spoil by an overnight passion And you had been, as far as I knew, faithful to me these twelve years. So why should I throw away something solid for something airy?

"I didn't And I thought we understood each other quite well. Now, all of a sudden, a woman appears upon the banks of The River, a woman I talk to for a few minutes, a woman you've not met, and here you are talking as if we were on the verge of separating, as if I were passionately in love and throwing you out of our hut This is the first time you've ever shown a hint of jealousy "

The grey-blue of her eyes was shimmering bright She was on the verge of tears.

Miserably, she said, "One of the reasons I've been able to keep you is because I've not been that jealous, insecure, nagging type of woman And you're right when you say that I would have taken you back even if you had strayed for a night or two Those other women might have been desirable bedmates, but I wasn't worried about losing you to them permanently They couldn't hold you

"This Anne de Celnos, though, is someone different I could tell by your face You looked almost . transfigured."

"Hardly," he said drily "You look transcendent when you meet a saint She's not at all that Not at all "

"I'm well aware of that," she cried "But I'm not going to make any moral condemnations of her. It would only disgust you, and I'd end up by being disgusted with myself for my hypocrisy."

She hesitated and then said, "Dick, I know better than anyone that I shouldn't be going on this way You hate it, and I've always hated such actions, too Only, now it's happened to me I don't seem to be able to help myself

"Anyway, what I was going to say was this I can't understand how you could suddenly fall for a woman like that I know you've never set any premium on virginity

Victorian as you are, you're not that stupid But this woman . . she was intimate with most of the great men of France of her time And her time was a long one Even at the age of seventy, she had lovers "

He puffed out smoke and said, "Really, Phyllis, it must be the time of the month that makes you behave so hysterically However, I might say that if she were so irresistible, she must have had something no amount of bedmates could dim."

"Then it *is* true! You have fallen for her!"

"Come off of it, Phyllis I liked her, yes But I didn't fall head over heels, arsy-turvy, in love with her "

He sat up and did what he had never done before, flipped his half-smoked cigarette into the corner Phyllis automatically arose, tears streaming down her face, picked it up, opened the paper, and poured the unburnt tobacco into the wooden can that was half-filled with previous shreddings Later, when the can was filled, the tobacco would be traded in the Mart for something they wanted.

He watched her bent and shaking back for a moment Then he arose and came up behind her and put his arms around her small waist He laid his head against her neck and said, "Believe me, Phyllis, I've never once thought of leaving you I am attracted to Anne, I must honestly admit. But I've no idea of kicking you out and asking her in "

She turned and kissed him and said, "I was hoping you'd say that.

"Ah, Dick, I love you, I love you!"

They kissed passionately Then he gently disengaged himself and said they must get to work

Phyllis nodded and dried her tears A moment later, things were as they were supposed to be

8.

Richard Black sat behind his narrow pinewood desk upon a severe and uncomfortable bamboo chair Phyllis sat to one side upon another chair, legs crossed, a smooth slab of wood on her lap, little slips of cigarette-package paper on the slab, her fishbone pen scratching her paper, a cup of

iron-tannate ink beside her on the floor. As paper was so valuable, she made little marks that were symbols for whole strings of sentences.

After she had taken his dictation of some general orders of the day, she rose and left the office with them. A moment later she returned, ushering a man ahead of her. He was about five feet one and had very dark skin and hair. His face was long and narrow, his nose was large and hooked, and his lips were thick. Undoubtedly, he or his ancestors had been born in the Eastern Mediterranean.

"This is the man I was telling you about yesterday," said Phyllis. "His name is Mukai, and he was a Pelasgian. As near as anyone can figure out from his story, he was born about the time the Achaeans first began to invade Greece."

Black spoke a few words in Homeric Greek. Mukai looked blank. Black tried several dialects of ancient Greek and got the same response. He switched to Hebrew and then to Arabic and Aramean in the hope that the man knew Phoenician and that there might be enough resemblance between the latter tongue and the former Semitic languages for him to understand. Mukai, however, did not respond.

Richard Black reverted to English, which Mukai spoke rather brokenly but fluently enough. The Pelasgian told his story with only a few prods from Black.

He had been drowned twice. Once, in the Aegean on the Earth, and later, in the waters of The River. Black asked him what part of the River. Mukai shrugged.

Was his section of The Valley like the one he was now in?

A shrug and a rolling of black eyes.

Did that mean yes or no?

Mukai answered sibilantly. Yesss.

Was it cooler there?

A little.

Did the Valley run generally east and west like this one, or more north and south?

West and east.

Ah! And what about the stars? Black described a certain

constellation called the Bow and Arrow and the part of the sky it occupied at this time. Did he also see that in his former section of The Valley?

Mukai said no.

Then, reasoned Black, the Pelasgian had first awakened somewhere in the upper limits of the northern or southern hemisphere of this unknown planet. This section of the Valley followed the equator.

Mukai said he had been drowned again while he was fishing and when he came to life the second time, he was in this part of the Valley about sixty miles west of Theleme. He had been put by the gods on the southern bank, where fierce dark men calling themselves Absaroki had made him a slave. Later, Murel's men raided the savages and put him to work as their bondman. After two years of service, an Agent of Black's had bought him for sixty five ounces of Scotch whiskey and a promise to try to locate a certain individual for Mukai's owner.

"Mukai," said Black, "did you ever see the headwaters of The River? Or hear of or know anybody who had seen them?"

The Pelasgian shook his head.

"Did you ever see or hear of anybody who wasn't human? Somebody who might have been a god or a demon? If that sounds silly, let me state it thus. Did you ever see or hear of anybody who seemed to walk like a stranger among men, who displayed more than ordinary powers?"

Mukai looked frightened, but he shook his head no.

"There are no tales of the gods having visited The Valley since you first woke up on The River's banks?"

None.

"You came to life twice. Both times when you opened your eyes, did you observe anybody else around, or were you alone?"

Alone.

Did the resurrection take place in the day or the night?

At dawn.

Was there any machinery near by?

Machinery?

Black explained.

Mukai shook his head. His large shining black eyes stared like those of a dog who does not quite understand what his master wants.

Would Mukai recognize his section of The Valley if he were to see it again?

Yesss.

Would Mukai like to go back there?

Yesss! Ah, yesss!

Meantime, would Mukai care to stay in Theleme and become a citizen? Perhaps to fight for Theleme against men like those who had enslaved him?

To the first, yesss. To the second, would it be permitted a slave to fight?

Black tried to make him understand that he was no longer the property of anybody. If he wished, he could walk out of the Castle, and nobody would stop him.

Mukai wasn't sure of that, but he nodded his head eagerly. He would very much want to stay.

Interested in the historical aspect of the affair, Black asked Mukai the name of his King.

The Pelasgian didn't know. He had been born on a small island and had stayed there all his life. Every year, the King's tax collector came, but he had never referred to the monarch by name. Mukai had been too busy making his living by fishing to inquire about such an unnecessary matter.

Black gave up. He said, "We'll see what your special talents, if any, are. Phyllis, will you turn him over to Jane for safekeeping."

Phyllis escorted Mukai out. No sooner had she left than a man stepped softly and quickly into the room.

9.

James Butler Hickok was a tall, handsome, and well built man with sharp blue-grey eyes, slightly prominent cheek bones, an almost aquiline nose, and golden-brown hair that fell to his shoulders. His lithe bearing and easy handling of

himself made him seem a man who would *not* be wary of open doors and people behind him. But he had good reason to be so.

He shook hands with Black; there was a brief but fierce struggle as each tried to outgrip the other. Then they released their hands as if they had not been trying to show who was the master.

"Well, Bill," said Black, "what did you find out?"

Bill stroked a non-existent mustache while his eyes glanced here and there. One hand rested on the handle of the knife stuck into the broad grass belt around his dark brown kimono. His voice was surprisingly high and thin for such a big man.

"I lived for two weeks in Murel's capital city—if you want to call that collection of shacks a city."

He paused, and Phyllis entered. They said hello to each other as if they'd not been separated for two weeks, but the warmness in Hickock's eyes showed his affection for her.

"As I was saying, I slipped into Murel's territory slick as bear grease and passed myself off as a translatee. After I signed up, I thought I'd have easy going. But I saw something that shocked hell out o' me and cramped my style from then on. I saw Tom Custer, and he was Murel's lieutenant. You remember my telling you the trouble I had with him during my Earthlife, don't you, Dick? Well, I knew that if he saw me, I'd be tied to a post and my belly cut open and, my guts unraveled like spaghetti. So I took care to get assigned to the other end of his stinking little kingdom. I didn't get caught. On the other hand, I didn't get to sign up for Murel's personal body guard as I'd planned. So I haven't anything to tell you about his personal plans that most everyone don't know, anyway."

"Sorry, Dick, but if Tom Custer ever laid eyes on me, he'd have my scalp. He ain't likely to have forgotten that incident in Hays City."

He paused and narrowed his eyes and added, "Any more than I have."

"Dick, I did hear a heap of talk, and I saw a hell of a lot

more. Stuff that'd curl your hair if you didn't happen to shave it so close to your head. Heeeh!"

"If you heard the drums this morning, you know he's sending some of his ambassadors here in a ship. They should arrive by noon tomorrow."

Bill swore and then said, "Excuse me, Phyl, but them sons-of-bitches make me fighting mad Dick, as soon as Murel's men step off their boat, you ought to hang some, scalp the rest, and send them back, C O D "

"We'll see," said Black, calmly "Tell me, how do the people under Murel react to his rule?"

"They don't like it none at all But what can they do? They'd like to tear out Murel's insides and choke him to death with them. Murel's got nigh on to twelve hundred men in that army o' his, and everybody else is unarmed If he wants to punish anybody, he jails all his friends and women, and starves some to death and ties others to a post in a square and makes everybody that goes by give him a kick or a blow with his fist until the poor critter's beaten to death And others he guts and then puts the guts around the necks of the friends that're still living. And the women he passes around his whole army until they ups and dies His territory runs for thirty miles along the northern bank That's thirty square miles. Average population is three hundred per square mile That means he bullies about nine thousand men and women."

"And his twelve hundred strong-arm men can keep them subdued?"

"Wal, it ain't as simple as that. He's got 'em split into two classes, them that gets more'n their share of the liquor and food, 'n them that don't get none Them that ain't in the Army, but are unarmed, bully those underneath them because they're afraid of those who do have weapons It's a dog-eat-dog system, there.

"I can't say much good for Murel and his men, but I will say they're wildcat fighters I went with him on two raids across The River and we did just fine "Course, we lost some men, too, them Sioux're just as mean and ornery as they ever was, and one night the Injuns raided us and stole

a whole bunch of grails and women, and we had a hell of a good fight I recognized one o' them warriors that night Burnt Tail He died o' smallpox back on Earth That night he died o' a broken skull 'cause I banged him over the head with a rock Wonder when I'll see him again, if ever?"

Black waited patiently until Hickok paused, because he was formulating questions to ask about the type of generalship Mure1 would probably demonstrate But, suddenly, his scout said something so startling that Black forgot his questions

"What did you say?" he demanded

"I was talking about this here Joe Caveman Believe me, Dick, he's ten feet tall and if he don't weigh almost a thousand pounds, I'll kiss a wounded skunk's hind end So help me He's covered all over with scraggly rusty-red hair and he's got long arms and a chest bigger'n a butt of whiskey and a neck that just ain't there and a face like an ape's Except for one thing No ape ever had a nose that sticks out like a circus clown's But big! And strong! Makes Goliath look like a puny weakling He carries around a wooden shield big as the side of a house, and an axe with a young boulder for a head When he goes into battle, Dick, he knocks down six Injuns at one swipe So help me, six! And don't none of them get up either Not likely, you know, with their skulls all crushed and their arm and legbones splintered and more of their blood outside their skin than in He's a raging cyclone, a one-man host of Philistines, and God help us if we don't find some way of killing him before he gets here Because he'll be coming with Mure1!"

"One steel-tipped arrow, well placed, will put an end to him," said Black.

"With that shield he's carrying? Lord, the sight of him'd unnerve any archer."

"Wait a minute, Dick," said Phyllis "Let me question him I think I know what this Joe Caveman is"

She asked Hickok a few questions, listened intently, and then, with wide gray-blue eyes that gleamed with a mixture of amazement and eagerness, turned to Black

"Unless I'm wrong, this Joe Caveman is a living representative of a species of near-man, a pre-human giant who lived about the time of Pithecanthropus or before. But I can't be sure without seeing and examining him, because some of the things Bill describes don't apply at all to what we knew of the neoanthropidae."

She turned to Hickok. "Bill, could he talk?"

"Yes, Phyllis, though the words sound strange. His mouth is built different than ours. And he can't pronounce s's or w's."

"Dick," she said, "in most respects he seems to resemble our conceptions of what the Gigantanthropus -or what we once called the Gigantopithecus—looked like He lived from 100,000 to 75,000 years ago An enormous near-man twice as large as a gorilla and with massive bone structures. Probably weighed close to a thousand pounds. This fellow must be that big. But the description of that big proboscis of his makes him sound as if he belonged to a species whose fossils we'd never dug up. I'd like to talk to Charbrass because twenty-first century paleontologists might have found his bones Anyway, this apeman might not even be related to the Chinese and Javanese giants he might have been a separate species, or even a separate genus, that lived after Pithecanthropus, not before I'd like to measure his cranium and make an estimate of the size of his brain It can't be too small if he can speak English Tell me, Bill, did he use fire during his Earthly life? What kind of weapons did he have then? What kind of food did he eat? Did he build dwellings or live under trees or in caves?"

Hickok gazed blankly at her with his gray-blue eyes and stroked the mustache that wasn't there "I don't know, Phyllis I never thought to ask him that kind of question I don't have no scientific training But I did find out something from him that's very interesting."

He smiled, leaned back against the wall, and slowly extracted a cigarette from his package Black felt irritated because Hickok was trying to build up a dramatic effect before he revealed his news And what he had to tell must be vital because otherwise he'd not be trying to make the other two ask him what he'd learned

"All right, Bill please, pretty please!" said Phyllis, smiling at Hickok and holding out her hands in a mock-beggar gesture.

The scout slowly blew smoke from his Old Gold and looked idly at the ceiling "Well, Phyl, it's this way The news I got is more precious than gold—of which I ain't seen any since I been in the Valley, by the way and I hate to spill it because I know that you and Dick, here, won't get another lick a' work done You'll want to hold a celebration."

"Look, Bill," said Black, "at any other time I'd be happy to play your little game of teaser But today is about the busiest one we'll have We've a thousand things to do, and not enough time to do half of them So please forgive me if I ask you to come out with it."

Hickok smiled slowly, but it was evident that he was having trouble damming up his story Suddenly, he burst out "Dick, it's what you've been looking for all these years! A man who's been to the River's headwaters"

Black forgot his reputation for imperturbability and jumped up from the chair He grabbed Hickok's shirt "This is true?"

"Yes Only I shouldn't have said it was a man who'd seen it I guess you couldn't rightly call Joe Caveman a man"

Black released the shirt and threw his hands up in the air

"My God, Bill, tell me his story! And don't spin it out and out like you westerners love to do Spare me for once Give me nothing but the most essential details"

"All right This Joe Caveman died back on Earth in a fight with two lions According to his story, he killed one and drove the other off—using a fistaxe, Phyllis—but then he died of the mauling he got And don't glare at me so fierce, Dick In the first place, I don't scare easy and in the second, I'm telling you about his Earth life because he insisted on telling me Says he woke up, after death, along with a bunch of his kind None of them had clothes like we did—because they didn't wear none in their first life But they did have grails—and what whoppers of grails, Dick! You should see them Three times as big as the ones

we got more like washtubs than anything. No wonder, the amount Joe eats. He gets fruit and bread and milk and big half-cooked steaks, almost a quarter of a cow. Well, I may be exaggerating a little, but they are awful big. And—oh, yes, he gets no liquor from his grail. But this Murel used to keep Joe happy by feeding him whiskey up to the day Joe got roaring drunk and went berserk and killed ten—I'm not lying, so help me, Dick—ten of Murel's best fighters before Murel hit him over the head with a club and knocked him out. From then on Joe never got more than five ounces of Bourbon a day."

Black sat down and began drumming his fingers loudly upon the desktop. Hickok glanced at the impatient hand, smiled slightly and continued at his former leisurely pace.

"Anyway, to make a very long story short, Joe lived for quite a while along the banks until one day a ship came along. Joe'd never seen a boat before, and he was curious. Anyway, there were real men on board this boat—and they needed a strong rower to replace a couple of men they'd lost. They lured Joe aboard and got friendly with him and talked him into going with them. Joe's not so dumb—he caught on fast—and he went to work for them. He learned some of their language and a fellow I met in Murelha—a scholar of some kind—said he thought it was Egyptian. He thought so because the description of the men sounded that way and also because of the names of some of the sailors. Nepi, and Tefi, and the like. And because the captain of the ship was named Ikhnaton. This scholar I talked to seemed quite excited and wondered if that could be the original Ikhnaton—whoever he was—and said it probably was because he was just the type of fellow who'd go on a quest for The River's End.

"Anyway, they sailed until they came to a place where rapids made it impossible—"

"Rapids?"

"You getting hard of hearing, Dick? Rapids. So they beached their boat and walked on the bank along the rapids until they came to a bunch of waterfalls. They had to start climbing then, and they kept on climbing day after day and sleeping on narrow shelves and paths at night. And finally,

after a helluva long time—Joe wasn't sure how long—they came to this bend on a very narrow mountain path Joe was in the lead, and he was the first to see the Big Grail."

"The Big Grail?"

Black was sitting upright, his fingers clutching the desk's edge, and his eyes shining with a dark joy.

"Yes, the Big Grail Joe said there was a great lake spread before him. In the middle was a big island, and the other side of the lake couldn't be seen because it was hidden in a mighty mist. But right spang in the middle of the island was a single peak, and the side turned to Joe had been partly uncovered by a great landslide. And there was the Big Grail, a mighty tower of the same white metal as our little grails are made of—at least it looked like that to Joe.

"Anyway, it looked like a thousand foot high grail, and it reared out of the pile of rocks that had slid away from it. It had been hidden beneath the rock of the mountainside until the avalanche Now it glittered in the rays of the setting sun, and that is why Joe met his downfall.

"He was blinded by the white glare, and he stepped forward with his hand over his eyes, and just then he fell over a grail that somebody had left on the path. Joe says the grail wasn't left there by anybody he was with because he was first along the trail Somebody else had been climbing there, and, for some reason, they'd abandoned their lunch bucket.

"Whatever reason they had, they did Joe dirt, for he tripped over it and went spinning down towards the river like a big hairy catherine wheel. He says that the last thing he remembers, just before he smashed into the rocks sticking out of the river, was a glimpse of the Big White Grail, shining like the promise of heaven at life's end—if you'll excuse my being poetic about it."

"You're excused," said Black "But I thought you were being sarcastic."

"And when he woke up again with all his busted bones whole, he was in Murellia And of course Murel nabbed onto him and recruited him for his army. And God help us,

Dick, when Joe attacks us, cause he's a holy terror and can lick a whole tribe of Pawnee with one arm tied behind his back."

Black paid no attention to Hickok's last words. He began pacing the room with his arms swinging and his eyes darting from side to side, an occasional reflex of savage grin lighting up his dark face. He reminded the onlookers of a caged black panther restlessly padding back and forth.

Suddenly he stopped and slammed his right fist into his left palm and swore in Arabic.

Phyllis' eyes widened with alarm, for she knew that he lapsed into that language only when he was on fire with some daring scheme.

"I have to talk to that Caveman," he said. "And at once! There's only one way to do so, and that is to go after him and kidnap him. Tell me, Bill, what are our chances of doing that?"

Hickok dropped his cigarette. After he'd picked it up and replaced it in his mouth, he said, "Nobody except some lying tramps that no one'd believe anyway has ever accused me of being a coward," he said. "But you wouldn't catch me trying anything like that In the first place, you could sneak into Murellia and probably knock the apeman out 'cause Murel himself did it But after that, what d'ya do? You'd have to tie and gag him and how're you going to carry off a thousand pounds of hairy flesh? On *your* back? Not mine."

"We could take enough men to get him aboard a boat and sail him down The River."

"You forgit, Dick, that his capital is in the middle of his territory You'd have to sail past fifteen miles of land, and he's got a helluva good sentinel system He'd send a drum message along, and in no time at all you'd be overwhelmed by a thousand fighters No, it wouldn't work."

Black began pacing again. "There must be some way "

"Dick," said Phyllis, almost timorously, "we have too many pressing matters even to think about some wild raid There's Murel's ship, and . . ."

Black spun so swiftly that Hickok, obeying his reflexes,

leaped back towards towards the wall, his hand on the knife in his belt.

Black laughed "Still the same old nervous Wild Bill, heh? Look, Phyl, you just gave me an idea. Why didn't I think of it before? The ship, the ship!"

She said, "What do you mean?"

"We capture Murel's boat, put their sailors in our gaol, and go back up The River in it, disguised as Murel's own men, land about dusk, and subdue this neoanthropoid, Joe."

Hickok shook his golden-brown curls. "The *Vengeance* is coming here under a flag of truce At least, it's flying somebody's white shirt on its masttop, so I reckon it is. Would you break a *truce?*"

"P'raps Why not, if there is something to be gained, and we're dealing with blackguards? You can't seem to get it through your head that Terrestrial conditions just simply do not hold any longer. Though we've been resurrected, there is no reason why our idols should be. The old institutions have been shattered with the mighty hammer of second life It's up to us to create new ones, ones in accordance with what reality demands, not what our ancestors—who are now rubbing elbows with us and are in the same fix—demanded that we perpetuate.

"Honor is a rather flexible word. There is no definition of it that everybody accepts. And here in The Valley is, I think, our chance to abandon such fossil ideas We're creating our own idols, fluid gods. Honor doesn't happen to be one of them, not, at least, in my pantheon And don't misunderstand me, for I'm not advocating treachery But I do propose a realistic conduct guided by the knowledge that the men we're dealing with can not be trusted

"In this particular case, we'll respect the flag of truce, but we'll keep our knives ready because we know that Murel will break his own truce the moment he'll benefit by so doing. However, we seem to have wandered from the original subject, Joe Caveman."

"I have a suggestion concerning him," said Phyllis "Why not do the easiest thing? Allow the mountain to come to Mohammed?"

"What?"

"Of course. We know that Murel will be attacking sooner or later and that the—the Titanthrop, let's call him—will be with him. So why don't we wait until then and take a chance on capturing him? It's the only sensible thing to do."

"And don't glare at me. You know very well this foolish raid of yours springs from your impetuosity and bravado."

"Thanks."

"No, I mean it. Look, Dick, haven't you told me time and again to remind you that you often made grave mistakes in your Earthlife because of your fatal hesitancy in your sense of timing? Remember, when you had a situation well in hand, you'd be inspired with some other project and rush off, thus ruining the success of your first? And you wanted me, as the woman who loves you, to remind you of that very fact. So why look at me as if you could kill me?"

"Maybe, Phyl," said Hickok, "it's because you're telling him off in front of me. You should've waited until I was out of the room."

There was a silence. Phyllis saw that Black's face was darkening, and she turned and left the room. Hickok stared after her a moment, then swung upon Black.

"What's wrong with you two? You were beginning to get edgy about the time I left two weeks ago, but I thought maybe it was just nerves, you been so tied up with getting that boat finished before Murel attacked, and she catching your jumpiness because you were short with her and maybe wasn't paying much attention to her. You know how women are."

"No."

"No what? You *don't* know how women are? I thought you was the expert on females?"

"No, I don't think that that is what is making her irritable. No, I don't think it's any of your business."

Hickok twisted the end of an invisible mustache and drawled, "Maybe it ain't none of my business. And, again, maybe it is. You and Phyl're friends of mine, and anything

that upsets a friend of mine ought to upset me, too. And if I can see any way out for them, I'll tell them so."

He paused, his eyes narrowed shrewdly, and then said, "A hundred dollars to a mangy old scalp that the trouble's another woman."

"You were right a moment ago," said Black, coldly "This is strictly between Phyllis and myself."

A few seconds later, Hickok strode out of the office, his face red. Black followed. Not seeing Phyllis, he told a clerk to inform her that he'd be up at the pass and would not return until late in the afternoon. Then he left the Castle with his grail in one hand and the iron walking-stick in the other. He struck diagonally across the Mart, speaking brusquely to those who greeted him. So intently was he brooding about Phyllis, he almost ran into Anne de Celnos, standing squarely in his path.

10.

Anne shook her long, chestnut-brown hair, and her dark eyes were leaping with laughter "Ah, *monsieur* Black, you make it a habit to ignore the ladies?"

"Only at times, Anne. There are things to think about besides beautiful faces."

"I will not ask you what has engrossed you so completely It would probably be something serious, thus something deadly."

"It is that, in the sense of being fatal."

"But there is no such thing as permanent fatality, Dick. Thus, there is nothing to be serious about. One may laugh and play all one wants, and love all one wants, with the person one wants."

"You are wrong, Anne Theleme might once have been that place you envision, but it is no longer. If Murel moves in, you will not laugh or love or play unless he says so. You will not even eat."

She shrugged and said, "Then I leave this place."

"He would kill you first."

Again the shrug. "So I go to another place where, perhaps, they think like me."

"And if they don't?"

"On to the next. Some day I will find the happy place, and I will stay there."

"Delightful philosophy, Anne, but you would become tired of the quest. Moreover, in all this long, long Valley, there might not be one single place such as you desire."

"You are indeed Black, Dick."

"No. I just do not intend that anyone shall chase me up and down the Valley. I will stand and fight for what I think is right."

"Bravo! Monsieur the gamecock is to be congratulated!"

He did not flush, but he looked darkly at her. Her black eyes met his; they had a light in them like pinwheels softly but vividly exploding in the night.

She said nothing, yet her every motion: lift of head, shake of hair, shrug of shoulder, uptilt of breast, her stance itself, patterned an invitation. It was subtle, for it was doubtful if anybody but the man for whom it was intended could have read it. He did, and he was surprised, for he would have thought himself repelled, or at least indifferent, to such jezebelry. But he wasn't. Nor was the reason hard to find. This woman had a *clean* air about her, she seemed above the ordinary woman who issues the flagrant invitation, almost as if there were something superhuman about her, or as if, so charged with sex was she, she was like a great battery that could be defined in terms of force or vitality but not in dirtiness. She was beyond that.

That, he thought, was all bloody nonsense. She was as much flesh and blood female as any, and it was stupid to think of sex in such emotion-charged words as dirtiness or Jezebel. Here, if you bathed and were honest in your relations, you were clean. There was no gonorrhea or syphilis or crabs, no pregnancy so that a new life became your responsibility, no marriage sanctions or marital controls universally recognized. Here, what you did was between you and others in terms of emotions only. Ethics and values, sexually speaking, were good topics for an evening's conver-

sation, but they didn't apply to you Sanctity was a word that should be unknown, that was only a carry-over from the old life.

If you were realistic, though, you recognized the fact that carry-overs had in many a very strong effect and that you had to deal with such people accordingly

It was that very fact that made it so easy for the two of them to get along She had, at that moment, no one to be responsible to, no one who thought she was his property and not to be touched because the touching might damage her value, no one who would hurt her because of her conduct.

As for him, he had Phyllis But they had stated to each other –not in black and white, for paper was too precious to use even on mating contracts but in a few brief sentences, that they would not care if the other "deviated", but would continue to accept the other as hutmate That is, they would unless the "deviation" became so meaningful that one would ask the other if he no longer cared to share the hut There would be no legal squabbles, no battles over property Each would pick up his grail and walk out with all the clothes he owned, those on his back, and the hut could go to whichever person wanted it

That had been the agreement. Therefore, there was nothing to stop him from accepting this woman's invitation, expressed inaudibly, yet sounding so strongly Those patterns of motion that set waves rippling through him, each gesture and change of curve and expression like a stone dropped in a pond and sending out widening circles

Anne said, "I would give you a *sou* for your thoughts, Dick."

He picked up his grail and said, "I have made up my mind I've been too busy lately, and I need an hour or two of relaxation Shall we go on a picnic?"

"Ah, Dick, that is what I like about this world If you go picnicking, you do not need to pack a lunch. You grip your grail so tightly, as you are now doing, and you walk off to wherever you are going. Which, if I may ask, is where?"

He put his cane under his arm and said, "We will go up

into the hills. There is a little spring that is a half-hour's walk from here. Nobody ever comes there. We may be alone without fear of interference."

His free hand gripped her by the back of her arm. Her flesh felt full, yet surprisingly hard beneath his fingers. He had expected more softness from her.

"You are sure I am not dragging you from affairs of state, Dick?"

"This is a state affair," he said. "As Louis XIV said, 'I am the State!' By the way, Anne, did you know that I am descended from the Sun King himself? He had a child by the Duchesse de Montmorency, and that child was taken to England. . . ."

They left the Mart and walked up the hills behind it. At first, the thatch-roofed huts were more numerous. So were the people who greeted Black. Their efforts to stop him and talk were cut short by a word. He could see them tonight, if what they had to say was important.

They replied that they just wanted to chat or to talk about the coming conflict with Murel. He gave them a flash of white teeth in his dark face or a clap on the shoulder. There was none of the typed reserved Englishman about him—and went on his way.

They followed no road; there was none. Wherever a man had taken a fancy to build a hut or a treehouse, he had done so, with the result that they were scattered here and there like a handful of dice. Most of them stood beneath the tall pinelike trees, which were the only arboreal vegetation in the Valley. Nowhere could you find any order, any street plans. If you wanted to locate a man, you had to ask your way around or wait until he came down to the Trade Mart, which most people did at some time of the day or evening, or else pay the MPA to send out a drumcall. Even then you might not be sure of finding your man, for he might not care to answer. In a world where one person did not depend on another for food or shelter, you could not expect him to come a-running. On the other hand, men were curious, and most liked to talk. They had few recreations, and if they had no work, time was an albatross

around their necks. Five got you one that a drumcall would bring you your man if he were in hearing

Black led Anne de Celnos up a path that wound through the woods Now and then, other paths crossed it After a while, she confessed that she would not be able to find her way back.

"You must not abandon me," she said

"I would not worry about your being lost You would find some man to show you the way"

She laughed "How right you are, Dick As far as that goes, I would not, perhaps, care much if I were to get back or not."

"Not as long as you have a man?"

"Not as long as I have an *interesting* man"

"Well, Anne, while there is something to be said for that attitude, I have always thought that the best of each sex preferred their own sex for company"

"You should change that idea, then For the negative attracts the positive, or so, at least, a twentieth-century man once told me. And like repels like It is true that a high type of man or woman should be able to get along with their own sex, should like their own I proved that on Earth, when I became old, for I was as well liked by women as I was by men, which demonstrated that it was not sex alone which made me attractive"

"At present, Anne, it helps."

"Ah, Dick, you are droll But do not look at me with those fiery black eyes, please, until we have eaten I am hungry, and one should not rush into such things without due preparation."

They entered a little glade surrounding a small spring The cold water ran off into a small brook that traced its way down the hill and then fell in a series of cascades to a large pool below.

"Would you want to bathe before we eat?" he asked "The water is cold, but the sun is warm enough to dry us off quickly."

"I don't fear cold water."

They went down the hillside until they came to the pool

There they opened their grails and pulled out a new bar of soap.

Black looked at his food container to make sure there was nothing that could melt. Once he had had a dish of chocolate ice cream, and, after opening the lid, he had been delayed before he could eat. As a result, the stuff had melted and he, who loved ice cream, had had to go for a long time before the arbitrary and invisible cook had served up that dish again.

There was nothing there that would not stand a short wait. He left it with the lid open and took off his clothes. He jumped in before Anne did and began soaping himself. The water was icy, he was glad to get out. Afterwards, he dried himself with his kimono while she calmly stood waist deep and poured handsful of the pool over her. Black, watching her, was lost in admiration, not so much at her figure as at her acceptance, even eagerness, for the bitterly cold liquid. She seemed to revel in twisting her full-fleshed body as if hot hands were running over her.

"Do not be alarmed, Dick," she called, giving him that smile that transformed her features into beauty. "I often used to bathe in cold well water. It was what kept me so young."

"P'raps you need it to keep from bursting into flame," he said.

She smiled and walked out of the water. He handed her her kimono; she rubbed it vigorously over her glowing skin. Then she came over to where he stood in a sunny spot, shivering slightly with something other than the coldness of the pool. He took her kimono and hung it over the limb, next to his.

She turned so that she came into his arms. It seemed the most natural thing in the world to do, and it was.

"Cannot you wait for lunch?" he asked.

"No."

"But what if I say you must?"

"I do not think you could say that."

"You're right—I can't."

11.

Afterwards, they washed again and then ate When they had cleaned the dishes in the brook that ran from the small spring, and put them back into the grails to their respective racks, they smoked Neither spoke It was as if they didn't have to.

Finally, he got to his feet and held out his hand to her She took it, and he pulled her up to him After he had kissed her deeply and lingeringly, he said, "Time is short, and I shouldn't have taken this hour with you But I don't regret it. It was wonderful, thank you "

"And now you must go back to business? To the war?"

"Yes From now on, I'll get little sleep "

"Well, Dick, when you do want to sleep, come round to the hospital " She raised her thick eyebrows and pursed her mouth "Or were you planning on inviting me to your hut to live?"

"Not unless you want to share my roof with Phyllis Somehow, I don't think my house would be a peaceful one."

"Oh, I don't know Phyllis and I might like each other "

"Under different circumstances, I think you would But not when you are both concerned over the same man "

"You are right," she said "I must have an instinct for finding the right man I wanted one who would make no fuss about his undying love for me or demand that I not even look at other males. You have taken everything rather matter-of factly, except the act itself, and you are not standing around with a mooncalf face and very much in the way, nor are you yelling that you will kill the first bastard that looks at me with that gleam in his eye "

"As if any man with normal glands could look at you without that gleam," said Dick "However, I'll be honest with you and confess that you're not just another woman You're special You may not believe this "

She touched his arm, feeling the hard biceps, and said, "I would believe anything you tell me—almost "

"Thanks . . . you may not believe this, but I have been faithful to Phyllis since she first came to live with me. That is, I have in Theleme itself. There were a few incidents of no importance during some trips I took without her. But she could have had no chance at all of finding out about those. And if she had, I'd have confessed. But I knew there was no use telling her. She'd have been very hurt, even though she has claimed she would understand such things. And . . ."

"And do you think she has been as faithful to you as you are supposed to be to her?"

He grinned savagely. "Her behavior is such that I am inclined to think she does not lie when she says she has been loyal. But—"

"But you would not be foolish enough to take a woman's word?"

"Scarcely. She is pretty, she is full-blooded, she has no fear that she'll be punished by society or an avenging deity—not that many women have been deterred by the latter fear—and she certainly has had no lack of offers from men. She takes a peculiar delight in telling me of them, my friends would be filled with consternation if they knew I was aware of their attempts behind my back. But, again . . ."

"She may not be telling you of all the proposals?"

"Right-o! Nor may she be—"

"—giving you the whole truth about her answers to these men?"

"True. You have to face these possibilities, but . . ."

"You pretend that she is wholly yours. Why not? She may be, and even if she is not, she is not hurting you."

"I didn't intend to say all that," he said. "For some reason, I was sidetracked from my original intention. What I started to say was that you are the only one who has seriously tempted me. I had begun to think myself immune, and then—"

"And then you met me, and in one day—less than one day—you fell."

"True, though I don't like that verb. There's too much

moral content I couldn't fall, because I had not placed myself on an impossible height, and so—"

"And so you were prepared to lie with the one woman in a million. And that woman, I may say without false modesty, was myself, Anne de Celnos."

He gripped her by the shoulder The flesh was noble, and any other time he would have relished its sensuality, it was so alive But not now He felt half amused, half annoyed

"Tell me, *ma chere*, are you sure that your lover strangled you because of jealousy or because he could never—"

"Complete a sentence?" She threw her head back and laughed Her hair, so brown-glossy, spread like a cloud about her neck; her mouth, so red, so—there was no other word but . . womanly, spread wide to let laughter escape her shoulders and heavy, shapely breasts shaking—she looked so magnificent at that moment that he would have taken her again if he had had the time

"Ah, Dick, my fierce black eagle, you have reason to be angry with me I have that fault; I admit it And if I again start to interrupt you . I seem forever to be wanting to talk, yet it is true that I can listen . You must speak out, fast and furious, and let me know"

"Don't worry, I will."

They picked up their grails and walked out of the groves And then they saw Fyodor Borbich

He was kneeling upon the path, which overlooked the pass out onto the plain and from which one could see part of the Trade Mart and the River beyond He, however, had his head bent and his hands seemingly folded in front of him as if he were praying When he heard the two walking out from the trees, he leaped up and spun to face them Recognizing Black, his little eyes widened

Black was furious, and, though he knew it was more sensible to appear indifferent, he could not

He said, heavily sarcastic, "Spying, Borbich?"

The evangelist stammered out an indignant denial but Black, his fury cooled a little by the man's offended speechlessness, guided Anne past him without another word

But when he was out of Borbich's hearing, he said, "I

don't think we should see each other until I've told Phyllis. Do you agree?"

"Yes. I will see you tomorrow then?"

"Yes, after the business of the day is finished. Although if Murel's ship makes any trouble, that may take quite a while.

12.

That evening, an hour before dusk, Dekanawidah and a group of fifty chieftains canoed across the lake Their visit was strictly a social affair, for it had been agreed that the political conference would follow after Murel's ship had arrived. The liquor of the General Fund was requisitioned and served freely, an *a capella* choir sang, followed by a famous twentieth century Italian coloratura. Afterwards, jugglers, dancers, and tumblers.

From then on the party became a drinking contest between the Thelemite Special Councillors and the Cayuga leaders. Black hated to indulge because he knew that he would need all his energy to see him through the next few days But to back out would be to lose face

Therefore, half of the night was gone before Dekanawidah suddenly rose and reeled to the great warcanoe drawn up on the beach Those of his warriors who were able got up and staggered after him.

"Goodbye, white brother Black," said the sachem, giggling.

Black, as always, avoided that hateful word of farewell, and responded, "Until tomorrow, red brother "

Then, after issuing a few orders to General Kelly, he walked with Phyllis to their hut in the hills. They were silent, she had spoken only a few words all evening and had scarcely tasted the liquor When they were home, he undressed slowly and lowered himself dignifiedly upon the bed. She did not crawl into his arm, as was her custom, but sat upon their only chair and smoked a cigarette.

"Tell me about Anne de Celnos," she said

"A charming woman," he answered.

"I'll bet."

"You lose. She is."

"Yes, I know. Ask *any* man."

"Anne is generous," he said, drily, "but she also seems rather fastidious."

"I know. She goes to bed with nobody but her friends, and she hasn't an enemy in The Valley. And when you think that every man that ever existed is available to her . . . Why, Dick, think, here's her chance to be the greatest tramp in the whole wide world! She could tramp up and down The River, and . . ."

He lay heavily on the bed, trying to breathe out the Bourbon that threatened to explode with every movement of his head. He liked good whiskey, but he did not care to get tight. He was wide open to attack then, and he might say or do something he would not otherwise want to do. Just now, for instance, he was becoming angry with Phyllis It was a sluggish and dark anger, but if she persisted in her efforts to arouse him, and he knew she would, then the anger would become fast and red Instead of slowly rising, tidelike, it would rear up suddenly, a wave tossed up by an undersea earthquake. He'd cut savagely at her with a vicious and sharp speech, and he might even resort to throwing her out of the hut He didn't want to do that, but she had no right to antagonize him so; she had made her bargain; let her stick to it.

She was standing over him now, hands on her hips, glaring at him. The single torch set in a bone handle on the wall behind her left her face in the shadows, but he could make out the twisted lines, the drawn-down mouth, the crooked pits of her eyes.

"Dick, you've always prided yourself on your honesty So, why don't you tell me what happened this afternoon?"

He might have known he would have to tell her. He didn't want to, as yet, because their twelve years together had made her hurt his.

But, if that were so, why had he made love to Anne? He had known what the result would be

"Well?" said Phyllis.

"You aren't the woman you were a day ago."

"You aren't the man!"

"Heraclitus was right. All things change."

"Don't start quoting Greek philosophers. Or Arabic, either. I want a straight answer."

"Answer to what? I don't remember your asking a question."

"Why are you dodging me? Are you afraid?"

"Afraid?"

He sat up and seized her wrist.

"I don't like for anyone to think I'm afraid."

"That in itself is significant."

She did not try to tear away from his grasp, partly because she knew she could not, partly because she wanted to show him that she, too, did not fear.

Her eyes met his without ricocheting.

Suddenly, ashamed of himself because he was playing the part of the big muscular brute and because he was reluctant to allow Phyllis to think of herself as a martyr, he released his grip. She was too proud to rub her wrist, she disdained such an obvious gesture for his sympathy.

"You're right," he said. "I should be indifferent as to whether or not you think I'm a coward."

She said, softly, "Don't be indifferent. I do want you to care. But . . ."

He lay back upon the bed and said, "Yes, I know. Yes, I did. I went into the hills with her. On a picnic. It was my decision. I wasn't lured into doing so, nor trapped by circumstances. I do not, however, plead guilty, because there is nothing to feel guilty about. Why should I? You know that we agreed we could take another lover whenever we wished."

He was surprised at what she did. No tears, screams, accusations, nor, even, a numbed and silent shock.

She sat down on the edge of the bed. He rose on one elbow and lit a cigarette. Before he flicked the match away, he held it close to her face. The flare of the match was like a spearhead thrown at her features. It showed him beauty and acceptance with dignity, not just spiritless resignation.

Struck by the same spearhead of flame, as if it had cut into a dark place in his heart, he said, "Lord, Phyl, I love you."

Phyllis started a little and drew back, as if she were not sure of what he had said. His match went out, and her face was left in the half-shadows. At the same time that warm and self-surrendering light in him went cold and dark, sunk back into the place from which it had been lured.

Nevertheless, the deed was done. She had tossed her cigarette onto the floor—gravest of all sins in The Valley—and had crawled into his arms and buried her face against his chest.

"Oh, Dick, I love you, too."

"Even if. . .?"

"Yes, even if I'm still scared of her, for something tells me you're not through with her. Just now, it doesn't matter terribly, because you said you loved me. But tomorrow it will."

He hugged her and ran his hands up and down her back. There was nothing to say, so he, with more wisdom than he might have had, said nothing. Phyllis lay quietly a while and then kissed him in the hollow of his throat.

She murmured, "Was she good?"

"I won't lie. She was."

"Better than I?"

"No."

"As good?"

Pause.

"Well?"

"In her own way, she was as good."

"What do you mean, in her own way?"

"Women—and men, too—are individuals. They can only get so good . and then you have to reckon them according to their personalities? No, that's not the word. Anyway, it doesn't matter. At the top, you're all equal. The difference, to the man, lies in his own responses."

"Which of us would you choose, if you were left on a desert island and could only take one of us?"

"You, of course."

"What if Anne had asked you that question?"

"Then I'd have told her that, of course, I'd choose her."

"You devil!"

"It'd be the only gentlemanly thing to do."

"You're no gentleman."

"True, but I am politic."

"Honey, I won't ask you again, for even if you did say you'd choose me for sure, how would I know you'd be telling the truth? I'll play it smart and pretend that you couldn't ever hesitate a moment but would at once take me."

"Right you are."

Long silence. Then, "Dick?"

"Yes?"

"Do you know that Anne is not really the person I'm scared of? The one who frightens me most is . . you"

"I?"

"Yes. I've thought for a long long time that there's something deep and dark in you, a tight fist clenched desperately on a part of you that you'll never give up

"Oh, I don't mean that you don't surrender yourself to me when we're making love Nobody could accuse you of being frigid It's not that It's that you don't give of yourself all the way There's a little bit held back, aloof and inviolate And that makes a difference To me, at least For I give all of myself, body *and* soul, every bit, a complete surrender.

"But you . . . you are different You keep back a fragment, deep and dark and frozen so fast it'll never, ever melt Not for a mere woman, anyway Perhaps it may unfold and spend itself on a quest for something like the headwaters of The River, the search for the Big Grail But to let loose on that last abysmal clutch of ice for a female—no

"Yet I love you, Dick And even if I couldn't have all of you, I had a large share of a man manlier than most And I didn't have to share you with any other woman Your Isabel was gone, and there's a thirty billion to one chance of finding her, and while I've felt sorry for her because she had lost you, I also felt glad because *I* had you Moreover,

selfish reasons aside, I've always thought that I was better for you than she She was a wonderful, talented, courageous woman who loved you very much, but she was also inclined to look upon you as a god to worship, a man who could do no wrong. And if you'd had to put up with her day after day in this Valley, you'd have found her rather sticky, I'm sure.

"Now Anne has appeared, and you've fallen as swiftly for her as you did for me You've experienced that thrill of nerve, that fast heartbeat over somebody new and glorious But I'll bet that even with all that you kept untouched the final part of you -the conviction that Richard Black has an unplumbed depth that no one, woman or god, will ever dive down to.

"I wonder if Anne knows that Or if she'd care if she did I do I care horribly—so much so that I'd almost—almost, I said—consent to share you with her

"But I've pride, besides the knowledge that if I did consent to such an arrangement, you'd be so contemptuous of me I'd truly and forever lose you.

"Oh, Dick, Dick, if only you weren't so damnably proud, and if only you could love me as I love you But no, you won't, you won't because you can't Here I am, feeling so sorry for myself, and it's you I should be weeping over because you are much more in Hell than I am You are in Hell, didn't you know that? Borbich says that Hell is the suffering of being unable to love And you can't, really, love as I know love.

"And yet, God help me, I love you more than I love anything—even if I can see you more clearly for what you are than anybody else ever has—even your beloved and lost Isabel "

She wept softly He rose from the bed and walked outdoors The stars, red and green and white and violet, exploded silently and forever above The Valley The big moon, unmarked by dark "seas," smooth and silver, was a quarter of the way across the sky, and The River sparkled with its rays.

The Styx, he thought.

And, no matter what scientific explanations Charbrass and Phyllis had for this world, it was Hell

Just as Earth had been.

13.

It was the middle of the following morning, and Black was alone in his office, busily going through a number of notes submitted to him by his MPA manager Suddenly, Hickok, a great golden-haired cat of a man, glided into the room Accustomed to the man's swift and silent entries, Black did not start, but he was interested in the flush upon his face and his clenched fists.

"What's the matter, Bill?"

"What's the matter?" said Hickok, angrily "I'll tell you! The first person I met this morning starts telling me about you and Anne de Celnos I asked him what proof he had, and he said he ain't seen you do anything wrong with her, but he's heard plenty And when I told him to shut his dirty mouth, he says that this is Theleme, where a man may do as he pleases And I remind him that that's true only as long as nobody is hurt And he says he's not hurting anybody, but that you are hurting Phyllis McBairn, and, by god, where is all that honesty you're all the time preaching about? It's sure not evident in the way you're hiding the truth from Phyllis.

"So I told him to shut up until he got the facts and to quit gossiping like an old woman Then, when I'm walking across the Mart, I run across that Rooshvan, Borbich, making his usual speech You know the one where he says man has to submit to love of man and God before he'll be able to penetrate the mystery behind this Valley and save himself from an eternity of wandering up and down it

"And what does he say but that we have to be honest and look at ourselves with unclouded eyes? And then he says that you—he called you King Richard was a living example of a man who isn't honest but claims he is Says that if you was what you made yourself out to be you'd not be sneaking behind your intimate's back and consorting with this depraved Frenchwoman Says he'd read in history

books about her and about how she was a grossly immoral woman who'd had over a hundred lovers on Earth and, what was far worse, never regretted any of them. And now she was here in Theleme and was spreading her—what did he call it?—oh, yes, moral indifference.

"And then he gets to crying, you know how that Rooshyan is, tears big as horse turds running down his sunken cheeks, and he says he's got nothing against Anne de Celnos and doesn't hate her, but in fact he loves her because she's a human being. And all he wants to do is help her, but she's turned down his offer of aid and laughed at him and his talk of how we're put along The River so we can discover our relations to each other and to God. And he says he loves you, too, even if you are a benighted heathen, but that if the people of Theleme want to get any place in their—their spiritual development, they'll have to get rid of you as their leader. And what's more, he says the *River Comet* ought to be burned, and The Mine blocked up, and . . ."

"What?"

"Take your big mitt off my wrist, Dick. You're about to press my wrist bones together. They're not made of rubber, you know.

"There, that's better. So I says to him, my friend, that boat is what we've been working for these past twelve years and we don't take kindly to such talk, and just why do you want it burned?

"So he says that he hasn't got anything against the boat purrsee."

"Purrsee? Oh, you mean, *per se*."

"That's what I said. What he's got against the boat and The Mine is that they've taken up so much of our time and thought that we've not had a chance to look into ourselves and into each other. He said that for the first time in our lives we don't have to worry about housing, food, bills, disease, or death. We've got all the time in the world—eternity—and we should be finding out what makes us tick, what makes us unhappy and quarrelsome and drunken and

crazy and bitter and frigid and selfish and proud, and all that sort of stuff. You know how he talks.

"But then Borbich goes on and says that this meteor falls, like Lucifer, and gives us a plentiful supply of iron and makes us kingpins in this section of The Valley. And so we're steered away from our original purpose by this star-fall, and we decide to build a boat—instead of a Tower of Babel—so we can go to the ends of The River. And we spend all our time on that, and as a result we've not progressed in—in *re-creating* ourselves.

"And much of our backward sliding, he says, is the fault of men like you and Charbrass and Clemens. Here we are, he says, with a wonderful chance to get away from all that technological absorption which men used to put up as a bar between each other and God. And this falling star is a gift from the devil, instead of from heaven, as we'd supposed. What we ought to do is burn the boat and plug up The Mine and the mountain passes leading to it, and lay down our arms and welcome Murel and his cutthroats with prayers and non-resistance.

"What if they did kill us? We'd come to life somewhere else in The Valley, and meanwhile it was possible that our example might make Murel and his men stop and think and maybe turn their thoughts just enough towards a better life so that they, too, might come to love men. Oh, he didn't think he'd produce any miracle in the Murellians, but it would give them a slight push in the right direction.

"Well, I didn't think talk of that sort would get any place, though it did make me mad. But, would you believe it, there were some people that began talking back and forth as if they thought he had something there. They wondered if they shouldn't try to make a truce with Murel. And others said they was getting tired of working in The Mine and on the *Comet* and never having enough leisure time like they knew plenty of other people in The Valley did.

"That makes me madder than a galled bull in rut, and I hollers out that nobody has to stay in Theleme if they don't want to.

"But Borbich ignores me and says to the crowd that now was the time to act. Burn the boat and then brave the wrath of you and the other big shots. Maybe just such an act might start the ball a-rolling.

"Well, when it came to action *now*, there weren't so many volunteers. In fact, I began to see that most of the talking and the noise was being done by Borbich's disciples. But I thought it was time to stop all that crazy ranting, and I was hopping mad, anyway.

"So I pulled Borbich down from the table he was standing on, and I hit him in the mouth and knocked out two of his teeth."

"Ah, ah, you shouldn't have done that, Bill. You know you're in for trouble. If Borbich accuses you before the Special Council, you'll be tried. And he could get you exiled."

"Don't worry. Borbich won't bring suit against me. Why, he got up off the ground and started crying and tried to put his arm around me and kiss me. Him and his bloody mouth! 'Twas all I could do to keep from knocking him down again."

"P'raps I should put him in the gaol during this crisis," said Black. "No, I won't. There's been too much criticism about my so-called dictatorial manners. But I'll detail somebody to keep an eye on him."

"What about using Anne de Celnos?" asked Hickok.

Black stared fiercely at the scout, who returned his gaze with wide and innocent eyes.

"Anne happens to be working in the hospital just now and, besides, she isn't familiar enough with Thelema to be a good shadow. Why do you suggest her?"

"I can't think of anyone that'd be more likely to keep a man so busy he'd stay out of mischief. All you'd have to do to find him'd be to find Anne."

"And Anne would be so busy that Phy. wouldn't have to worry about where she was? Is that it?"

"I'll be honest with you. It is," retorted Hickok, steadily though he knew from Black's darkening skin that the situation was dangerous. "I just happen to think a lot of Phy.

and I think you'd be better off with her than with that Frenchy."

"Next thing you know, you'll be preaching like another Borbich."

"Take it easy," said Hockok, sighing. "This ain't getting us no place. What's your orders?"

"You're tired?"

"I've had no sleep for two days and nights, but that don't bother me."

"Hole yourself up in your hut or somewhere in the Castle. Sleep if you can. You may need all your strength before the day's over."

"That soon, I guess." When I left Mars's quarters most of his men was still there and they seemed busy watching our drummer boys setting them right. The Indians was watching us."

"Don't take anything for granted. Moreover, there's no, I suppose." It's big enough to carry a couple of hundred men. Perhaps there's some truth to what he's saying here."

Bill yawned and said, "I'm not sure. Anyway, I'm crawling in my hut for some shuteye. Call me if you need me. Oh, by the way, where's my lady love? I've been over for her but I can't find her. I thought maybe she'd up and left me and was living now with Chamberlain. She and I aren't been getting on so good and she was sore on that score from Mars. But he said he hadn't seen her."

"How should I know where your Lady Bess is? She ain't manager at the Missing Persons Agency."

"Not me. I wouldn't give an ounce of my sweat for that job. And I wouldn't care if she was sleeping with Chamberlain. I was over there to see her and she and all me a new hammock maybe. And do without. Seeing as how she don't care for me, I wouldn't sleep with her."

"What's your own sleeping arrangements, Bill? Your Lady Bess is sure of anything with Chamberlain if you haven't noticed. He's always been a..."

Hockok stopped me there. "What was that? Didn't you think he's queer?"

"No, I don't. There's no evidence for such an assumption. And if he were, what would hold him back from admitting it. There's no law here against that, you know, as long as such a relationship isn't forced upon anybody."

"I'd say he was impotent," replied Hickok. "But he don't look like a weakling to me."

"Maybe he just doesn't care for women."

"He's always friendly with them," said the scout. "In fact, he's the affirmedest friendliest man I know. Yet there's something standoffish about him. Now, ain't that queer?"

And, shaking his long golden-brown curls, Hickok stepped softly from the room.

A few minutes later, drums spoke. Black looked out the window. Two miles away, at the far end of the lake, where the River flowed back into its customary half-mile channel, was the blockhouse that guarded Thetemes western boundary. He could see its tall signal-tower and the tiny figure of the drummer crouched above his great drums.

"Hey, Black Castle, wake up! Answer."

The drums on the Castle's rooftop throomed back, "What do you want, boy? Don't be bashful. Speak up."

"Here comes Murel's boat around the bend, digging water as fast as it can. Dig, dig, dig, boy. It'll be there in about an hour, as the sand runs."

"What do you want me to do about it, cat?"

"Cal, the big boss, the great cheese himself, the Lord Protector of Thetemes, secretary of the Special Council, sometimes known as the King, Richard the First, or if you prefer, Mr. Black, First Comrade, Big Brother. Anyway, tell him to come a-running."

Grinning, Black withdrew his head from the window and walked to the spiral stairway that led up to the roof. Many of his drummers were twentieth-century Yanks, breezy and ready to take as many liberties as he'd allow. Jimmy Barker, the signalman on duty on the roof, was one. He had once been a piano player and then had operated a radio upon a Flying Fortress until the day it ran into another during a takeoff in an English fog. He looked up from the

great cylinders of human skin over which he crouched and grinned toothily.

"Yeah, man, what's the send-off?"

Black gave Barker the message. The Yankee beat it out with the thighbones that so many of the Stoneys seemed to be using probably for their shock value. The signalman in the blockhouse passed it on to the Pentecostal. A crewman on board the ship replied. The latter was not an MFA man but he knew the system that was standard issue. Black kept two codes, one for common usage and the other for secret messages.

The Moreman replied that the boat would obey Black's instructions and would anchor out in the middle of the lake. Also it would send a few men ashore to discuss with the Special Council. Furthermore, if Black suspected bad intentions, he'd be allowed to come aboard for the inspection trip. That is, unless he was afraid to put himself into their hands.

"Barker," said Black, "tell him that the day I'm afraid of a Marellian, I'll drown myself in The River. And as for treachery, I'll be well prepared for that."

Back came the Pentecostal's answer on the blockhouse. "Captain Michael O'Finn is not afraid to put himself into hands. He dares to come ashore with more than two men. Not only that, he challenges you to a duel with any weapon you care to name. Anything goes, except that both hands off and wounds get to take the opponent's head home with him. And what's more, if Captain O'Finn does win, can not only have his head, but also take over the Pentecostal—hull, mast, crew and all. What do you say? Signed, Captain Michael O'Finn."

Black snorted. Dear, dear Dad O'Finn. Even as he was a juvenile playing at knights of the River Table.

He was about to give a cold and disdainful refusal when he saw Barker's brown eyes [illegible] He [illegible] pressed and said in private as well as he could that he hoped [illegible] that he'd like to [illegible]

Black paused. Everybody in the [illegible] the challenge and would [illegible]

[illegible] thereby lose face?

[illegible] val proposal

[illegible] would say. No statesman worthy of his salt did.

Yet there was *face*. Not just his, but Thelema's. Wouldn't it be better for the future credit of his little country if he did take up the challenge?

[illegible]

"Dick, Dick!"

[illegible] said something . . . something . . ."

[illegible]

"Foolish?" he completed.

[illegible] teller."

"It must be nice to be able to read a person's mind that way."

"Oh, Dick, you like to put on a mysterious front, and it fools a lot of people, but not me. The only thing is, I'm usually able to pretend I'm deceived because that's what you want. But not now, not now. This is too serious."

"Dick, you might be killed!"

"That hadn't escaped me. However, it wouldn't make any difference, really, you know. I'll be . . ."

"It makes a lot of difference to me!" she blazed. "I might never see you again. And if that happened, I couldn't live without you."

"Now you are getting hysterical," he said, coldly. "You don't believe that statement yourself. You know that after a decent period of grieving—perhaps five or six months, but no more—you'd be taking another man into your hut."

"Oh, Dick, Dick, how could you be so cruel!"

He took her hand and led her to one corner of the ramparted roof, where Barker could not overhear them.

"How many times have I told you to confine our familial disagreements to the walls of our hut!" he said in a low but cutting tone.

"To hell with that!" she cried. "This is life-and-death. I won't have you throwing away all we've worked for in the past twelve years and all we mean to each other just to cast your heroics into people's faces!"

"Ah, won't you, now!" he said levelly. "Phyllis, you spoke earlier of my wife, Isabel. You said she was too worshipping of me, allowed me to have my way too much. Perhaps you're right, but she at least knew when not to interfere. If she were here now she'd not like it at all that I'd be putting myself in danger, but she'd never say a word against it. Instead she'd hand me my saber with a smile and tell me to kill O'Flynn quickly. There'd be not the flicker of a doubt that I'd win. She'd *know* that. Whereas you, I'm sorry to say, seem to think that that clumsy, ignorant Mississippi keelboatman might know enough of the fine art of swordsmanship to defeat me. I find that attitude distressingly empty of confidence in me."

She flinched at the cut of his words, sharpened by his savage expression and the painful grip of his hand around her arm. But when he started to turn away, she said, "I'm still a better woman than she was, any day of the year, and I love you as a woman should, not in a spineless doglike way."

Black ignored her, but he noticed by the uneasy shifting of Barker that he had heard, too. That knowledge added to his fury. He shouted at the drummer. "Tell O'Finn I'll fight him with sabers, and the winner can take the other's head, and nobody will interfere. We'll duel after we hear whatever he has to say of interest. And there will be no revocation of these words."

The drum thundered. Then came the boom-vroom of the relay man, and, as those ceased, the almost inaudible thum thum of the *Vengeance*.

Phyllis walked by Black, and, as she did so, murmured, "I'm sorry what I said about Isabel. But I wish that you loved me at least as much as you do yourself."

"This is something that has to be done. And I don't care for interference—least of all by a woman."

Apparently she felt she had made her last appeal to his reason and to his heart, for she hunched her shoulders and disappeared down the stairwell.

Darkly, he watched her go.

14.

He stood for a moment, caught up in a net of reverie. His eyes swept over the great steel catapult on its wheeled carriage, standing in the middle of the roof by a pile of large rocks. Then he walked to the western rampart and leaned his elbows on its bricks of baked clay.

Below him stretched the square of the Trade Mart, green with the trampled but hardy grass that grew tenaciously wherever it could get a hold. Men and women walked around observing the various objects offered for barter. Here and there sat the traders with their wares before them—empty lipstick cases made over into earrings, pens and tiaras made of fish bones, bags fashioned of woven grasses

or of urine-tanned human skins, drums—also made of skin, clay trumpets, pottery pinewood sandals, woven grass hats, grass skirts—the latest rage among the women, statuettes, carved of bone, and of various soft stones, and bone needles, knives, and fishhooks. That about completed the list except for the intangibles. These were offered by singers, tumblers, jokers, traveling players, and others who could entertain in some manner. A man who could sing or tell a good story was much in demand in this Valley, where there were no books, movies, or TV shows.

The Trade Mart was not too busy, for most of the bartering was done in the evening. Nevertheless, those Thelemites who had no duties at that time congregated here to talk, and there were quite a few who were working on the *River Comet.*

The *Comet* itself floated between two docks and was partly covered with scaffolding. Beside it was a tall crane which swung equipment to various parts of the boat. It was operated by a steam engine that was the pride of Theleme because, as far as they knew, it was the first motor to be built in the Valley. It was also the only one that had worked as yet, because the engine of the ship itself had not been put into operation. It was ready for a fire in its boilers, but the great stern paddlewheel lacked six of its blades. These were being shaped and planed at the sawmill which was back in the hills, set along the creek and close to the blockhouse that guarded the pass to The Mine.

Black gazed fondly at the *Comet* and allowed the luxury and sheer sensuous pleasure his eye found in it to stroke away the irritation left by his argument with Phyllis.

It was built after the model of a nineteenth century Mississippi sternwheeler, and differed from that type only in a few particulars. Black could see the gleaming white shirt and slacks of Sam Clemens—a big, black Havana stuck between his lips, his bushy red hair glinting. He was standing by the wheelhouse, directing the installation of the machine gun. This hung from a cradle at the end of the crane's cable and was being gently lowered into its station on top of the wheelhouse. Charbrass stood on top of the house with a wrench in one hand, awaiting the time when the big

barrel and drum would swing within the reach of his gang. Black was interested in that gun because it would, in his opinion, make the *Comet* almost invulnerable. It embodied a principle in arms new to him; it had a steam-operated drum that utilized centrifugal force to throw a stream of iron slugs out of a twelve millimeter barrel. If Black had not had so much work to do, he would have been on hand to help install it. As it was, he could only watch from his place atop the Castle. He wished that the boat could be ready to steam and the gun could be used that afternoon when the *Vengeance* sailed into the lake. He'd not have wasted time but would have attacked it at once and either sunk or captured it.

As it was, it would be another week before the ship would be ready to back away from the dock. And before then Murel might attack. If he did, thought Black, the work on the *Comet* must go on, no matter what the cost. If Murel were to take that boat, all Black's work for the past twelve years would be wasted. The ascent up the River in quest of its headwaters and the solution to the mystery of this world would be put off that much longer—perhaps for years.

He transferred his gaze from the swarm of workmen around the *Comet* and critically inspected the drilling of several squads of the Thelemite Legion at the far southern end of the Mart. These were infantrymen, each clad in a coal-scuttle steel helmet and a shirt of light chain mail padded underneath with woven grass quilting. They bore on their left arms round, concave shields and they clenched long sabers in their right hands. They were the Regulars, the men who guarded, night and day, the outer limits of Theleme, manned the blockhouses, Castle Black, the *Dragon's Tooth*, and were stationed at every MPA and drumsignal post.

Every citizen in Theleme kept in his hut his armor, spear, and saber, but they drilled only twice a week. Nevertheless, the fact that they alone in this section of the Valley wore hard iron and swung sharp steel made them a formidable force. Though outnumbered, they had, until recently, walked serenely wherever they chose. The Indians across

the river and their neighbors to the east and west envied them but, until now, only one had made any threatening moves. The Cayuga had tried to raid them several times, but after their weapons of flint and chert and chalcedony had spun harmlessly off of metal links and shields, and after razorsharp edges fashioned from the iron of the falling star had sliced into their flesh, they had made offers of peace. And now that Black, through Tsechan, was offering a limited amount of steel knives and spearheads to Dekanawidah in return for a permanent alliance, he could soon depend on them. The only trouble was that the shrewd chief was holding out for more weapons He knew that Black was hard pressed, and he hoped to use his bargaining advantage to profit Black, however, expected that Tsechan would talk Dekanawidah into making up his mind quickly If Murel were to get control of the source of iron, he would pose a real threat to the Iroquois.

There was more to it than that, thought Black, turning to look east Up there, where the lake narrowed again to the River's normal breadth of half a mile, were white men who hated Black They were, most of them, Victorians who abhorred Theleme's liberal policies and denounced it as a sort of Sodom and Gomorrah Though they had endured the shock of resurrection and the adaptations that followed, they still clung to many of the old idols they had worshipped on Earth The mighty hammers of Valley life had shattered a thousand ideas, but there had been some things that had been driven in too deeply to be lightly cast out Among these were certain unreasoning moral attitudes, they could not stand the idea that if you were a citizen of Theleme you did exactly as you pleased And of course, such an elastic definition of conduct resulted in behavior patterns that seemed, to the eyes of outsiders, very peculiar and offensive And, to add insult to insult, Theleme had been responsible for cleaning out the many little tyrants along the banks of the River for several hundred miles on each side of their state It is true that it had been done at the express invitation of these communities, so they could not say later that their deliverance had been forced on them at the hands of a greater tyrant For, afterwards, though it

would have been very easy for Theleme to have stationed iron-weaponed garrisons among them to 'keep order,' the Thelemites had withdrawn to the western shores of their lake state Nevertheless, the liberated communities had, after a not-too-long time of gratitude, come to look askance at the Black Kingdom, as they termed it. They could not abide such immoral goings-on, yet, because of their lack of organization and minerals, they must

And when Murel, some four years ago, had appeared upon the banks about thirty miles down the River, he had found conditions ripe again for the establishment of just such a gang state as Black had wiped out twelve years before.

Murel, according to report, had been an American born towards the end of the First World War Raised in Chicago, he had gone into the ministry and led, according to his own account, an exemplary life, having, at the time he died at the age of thirty-three in a car crash, a wife, five children, a county parish, and almost no bank account When he awoke beside the River, he had experienced the standard reaction of great fright, followed by great elation. But in his case, the reaction had gone on to intense rage, a rage caused by the fact that, although he had been raised from the dead, he had not come into the sort of existence he had been led to believe would be his due

Unable to accept the evidence of his senses, he took his grail in hand and wandered for a year. At the end of that time, he reluctantly came to the conclusion that if this was Heaven, it had no selected clientele and that the conduct of his life, irreproachable and self-sacrificing, had had absolutely no effect upon his afterlife rewards.

And if this was Hell, it was certainly not at all the place which he had taken some pains—and pleasure—to describe to his congregation. While the Valley was not as Celestial as he had been led to think Heaven was, neither was it as infernal as Hell. In short, the gods had either ignored him or were snickering up their sleeves at him—that is, if there *were* gods—and the banks of the River was a place not too unlike Earth. Indeed, it had one feature which Earth had

never had, or at least had not been able to prove an assured resurrection after every death

It was this fact which had held Murel's rage in check for so long He could not imagine what this meant, what lesson it was supposed to point. But when, at last, he came to accept it as merely one of the many mysteries of Valley life, he then proceeded on the assumption that this was a life of material values, and that you should get out of it what it seemed to offer. women, liquor, and power.

Though he was handicapped by having been translated among a people strange to him dwarfish, long-haired, white-skinned Ainus who had lived upon the Asiatic mainland before their invasion of the Japanese mainland—he had managed to establish himself as the chief of a certain area In a short time he had a harem and a gang who kept others of their kind in semi-slavery and half-starvation They took all the liquor and part of the food and lived as high as was possible in this place of limited resources

Though a foreigner, he was helped in his rise to power by the fact that the Ainus were still a little dazed and paralyzed They found themselves in an afterlife where there was no great protecting Bear God and where their extreme hairiness, on which they had prided themselves, no longer existed. They, like every other male along the length of the River, had been treated so that their facial hairs no longer grew. Gone forever were their magnificent beards They were as yet uncertain of themselves, and a predator like Murel found them easy prey.

After years of such a life, Murel grew tired of the ugly little women and of being a big frog in a little pond Desiring people like himself, he set out for exploration of The River, and sailed down with the current After several years of innumerable adventures, he came to a section of the southern bank along which lived a group of Polynesians These people seemed to have made the transition from death to life, from Pacific to River very easily Inasmuch as Murel kept his ambitions well hidden at first, he was welcomed But here Murel fell afoul of an Italian named Sozzini, one of the missionaries of the then newly-created Church of the Second Chance Murel's violent reactions

towards Valley life included an extreme antipathy towards anything that even hinted of theology or metaphysics. One of his first acts was to lure Sozzini into the hills, presumably for a private discussion, and murder him. He got away with that, but when he later tried to assassinate the chief of the local Samoans, he was caught and clubbed to death.

When he came to life again, his broken head quite repaired, he found himself on the northern bank again, about thirty miles west of Theleme.

This time he was more subtle in organizing his band of strongarm men, and within two years he was in control of an ever-growing kingdom. And now he was encroaching on Black's own territory.

And, Black thought, Murel would have a good chance of winning, he'd be willing to expend half his men or more to take the prize of Theleme.

15.

At that moment, a visitor stuck his head above the stairwell. He was not one of those Black had thought to see, however. He was Borbich.

The man smiled painfully. His lips were puffed and gashed, and his two upper teeth were missing.

"Your scout struck me," he said. "But don't misunderstand me, Mr. Black. I'm not here to complain. In fact, just the opposite. I'm here to apologize. You see, I was urging the crowd to burn your ship and throw down their arms and then open the frontier to Murel's men."

"Yes, I know," said Black. "And I could have you killed for an *agent provocateur*."

Borbich threw his arms wide open, and smiled so that his ugly and colorless face looked almost beatific. "Go ahead. Kill me. You will have committed a crime against yourself, not me. I will rise elsewhere, but you will still have my blood on your hands."

"Don't be so goddamned corny!" snapped Black. "And allow me to remind you that I could do better than kill you. I could lock you up for a long time—forever, p'raps."

"Not you, Mr. Black. You do not have it in you. That beast Murel could do such a thing, yes, but not you."

"If Murel is such a beast, why do you want to surrender to him and put ourselves at his mercy—of which he has none?"

"Because by doing so we might, for the first time, open the gates in his heart to compassion. He might see intimations of what it is to be a human being and not an animal. Though I shouldn't say that—each of us, yes, even the lowest, is a man capable of . . ."

"I've no time to bandy words," said Black. "What's your business?"

He looked past Borbich for the stream of councillors who would be raging at him for having accepted O'Finn's challenge, but no one, as yet, appeared.

"What's my business?" asked Borbich. "Compassion is my business, Mr. Black, as it should be everyone's. Compassion is, indeed, the chief law of human existence—if not the only law."

"And what does this lead to?" Black asked, refusing to admit to the man that there might be anything in what he said.

"Mr. Black, you've not listened to me before, so you don't know what a tremendous discovery the Church of the Second Chance has made. I've told Phyllis, and she's said that she'd try to pass on my story to you, but you've always cut her short when she tried to. Why? Why? Because you were afraid of what you'd hear?"

"Will you get to the point? Or must I be like Father William and kick you downstairs?" Black grinned savagely, his hands twitching.

"Ah, ah, Mr. Black, you shouldn't talk so fiercely. I know you have a tender heart concealed behind that purposely barbarous exterior, I know because I have seen it in little acts of kindness you've done for the insulted and the injured when you thought no one was looking. But it's not necessary to act the superman, you know. And it *is* dangerous, because you might come, in time, to believe your own pose. Then what?"

"And indeed—what?"

"Just so. I stray from the point. Well, as I said, compassion is the chief, the indispensable law of humanity At the same time, if you study the lives of our great leaders on Earth –oh, I don't mean Caesar or Napoleon, but men like St Francis and Buddha and others of the truly great Because they were humble, you see, they were all truly compassionate.

"Wait, wait, don't look so impatient! I have a story, one that I think you will find interesting; in fact, the most interesting story of the Valley, because it is the most significant.

"It is the story that the Founder of the Church of the Second Chance told me, and the one that determined me then and there to abandon the old superstitions and false idols I'd carried with me on Earth It made a new man of me, and that, in itself, was the first and most important step a man could take in this Valley

"The Founder told me that he had first awakened among a group of Asiatic Indians, most of them born in the Rajputana about the middle of the Fifth Century B. C. He settled down among them, learned the language, and began studying Hindu philosophy, most of which, as you can expect, had by that time been rejected by even the firmest believers. Nevertheless, the Indians were making an effort to adjust to this new life, to separate Terrestrial chaff from River wheat. And it was then that my friend, the Founder, met an Indian who said that he had first risen from the dead near the body of Gautama Buddha, whom he had known when that man lived.

"Notice I said the *body!* For, though Buddha was resurrected in the flesh, he was dead. The flesh was cold, and the warming spark, the generating principle was absent. Somehow or other, his resurrection, among all the billions that must have taken place, had not succeeded

"The story made a profound impression on my friend, because he felt that this might be a clue to the solution of the many mysteries of the Valley He went to the place where Gautama was buried and talked to others who lived close

by and who had known the man well enough during his lifetime so that they could swear that this was his corpse which had been put beneath the earth

"My friend dwelt there a long time in the simple and peaceful life that is possible in this Valley if you are among an unwarlike and happy people Then one day he decided that sitting and talking was pleasant enough, but he was getting no nearer the mystery of our origin and our purpose along the River So he rose and took his grail in hand and walked down along the River.

"It was many years later that he came across a man, an Italian of the thirteenth century, who was far from his own people, for he, too, had been walking along the banks, searching.

"He said that he had awakened among other Italians of his time and he had at once tried to set the pattern of his Valley life after that of his Earthly life, which had been that of the ruler of a state, a prince who had schemed always for more power and territory. He was successful for a while, until the day came when he massacred a neighboring gang and took one of its members, a Provençal as prisoner And this Provençal had a strange story to tell He said that when he had first risen upon the banks, he found himself beside a corpse He recognized that dead man as a man who had led an exceedingly humble, devoted, and loving life and who had been canonized by one of the churches of that time which church, it does not matter Yet here was this fellow, the one that you might expect above all others to be given a chance at afterlife, lying cold beside the River, perfectly formed as a twenty-five year old youth, but lacking the vital spark.

"So this saintly man was buried and the Provençal who had known him went away, mystified and grieving

"Now, when this Italian prince heard this story, he felt strangely weighed beneath it It was a burden he could not shed, and, after a while, without a word to his followers, for he knew they would not understand and might even resort to violence to restrain him, he picked up his grail and walked away And everywhere he went he asked about this saint who had been born again, but born dead this un

resurrected Lazarus. And he walked uncountable miles before he met, purely by chance, or Providence, my friend, who had a similar tale about another unrising man

"So the Italian and my friend decided to join forces. They walked together after that, or, when they came to territory whose savage inhabitants threatened danger, they built a boat and paddled downstream.

"Always, they asked if anyone had heard of a man or a woman who had appeared the day of the Great Cry and had not risen because he or she was lifeless.

"They must have asked a million people, and were beginning to think that their quest was hopeless, when, one night, while seated around a fire to which they had been invited by a group of early first century Samaritans, they were told of a woman whose daughter had been another of the dead Lazari.

"Directed toward her dwelling place, they found this woman the next day and asked her if what they had heard was true She said yes, that after she had come to life upon the banks, she had searched for her daughter, whom she had loved very much And she had not gone far when she was told by a friend that her daughter was buried. When she asked what had killed her, they said that no one knew, for the daughter was dead from the very first moment of her appearance in the Valley.

"That had been several days before, so this woman went to the grave and dug up the body to make certain that it was her daughter. And it was.

"Now, that was not the only thing about the story that resembled so much the other two For one thing, both those women had been famous during their Earth lives for their humility, their cheerful and bouncing good natures, and their interest in helping the poor, the sick, and the downtrodden. Unlike the Indian and the Italian, however, these two had been married during most of their adult lives and had borne many children And the daughter, the one who did not rise again, had a more fiery temper than her mother The daughter, it appeared, had been in trouble sev-

eral times because she had got away with injustices and oppression."

Black had been interested in spite of himself. "Wait a minute! Why add all these details about her being married and her temper when you haven't mentioned them in relation to the other two corpses?"

"Because the Founder of the church was trying to determine whether there was a basic personality pattern common to these three cases. If their traits agreed on all important points, they might be the clue to the lifelessness of these three.

"He did discover in them a common love for mankind, a sturdy appreciation of such things as good food and good clothing without allowing these to become too important, a self discipline, a love for God, a hate for injustice, a scorn for conventionality when it crippled a man's development of honesty and charity, and a certainty that man is not born only to perish and never again to rise.

"But he did not know what these common factors meant. He and his friend wandered on, and in three years they heard of three other cases. But these were not like the first, they happened years after the Great Cry and at different times. Two were men and one a woman. In each incident the body belonged to a stranger and bore no marks of violence or signs pointing to the cause of their deaths. Their bodies were intact, yet they were dead. Obviously, they had been killed in some other part of the Valley and had been intended for resurrection, but, through some failure of the process which translated them, they had failed to come to life.

"Unfortunately for the Founder's investigations, he could find nobody who recognized these three. Nor, despite more years of wandering and questioning, was he ever enlightened about them.

"Yet he did not allow these three failures to stop him, for he had faith that these corpses, if they could live again, would tell him of lives similar to the first three. And he was sure that he had found the key to the mystery of all six cases!"

"Which is?" asked Black. He wanted to hear all of Borbich's story, but he saw a group of the Councillors striding across the Mart toward the Castle, and he knew that they would soon be interrupting them and he would have to explain why he had accepted O'Finn's challange.

Borbich continued, "Which is that, for some reason, through processes unknown to us, the Valley of the River has been built, and the grails furnished us, and the resurrection provided, so that we may, in time, no longer be able to live in the flesh!"

Borbich paused to watch the effect of his words His broad face was flushed with excitement and his hands were shaking But when he saw Black wasn't going to reply, the Russian continued "If that sounds contradictory, it does so only because it is a surface statement The Founder of our Church came to the conclusion that our Creator has given us a Second Chance Once, on Earth, we had our chance, and most of us failed. And . . ."

"What was that chance?" asked Black

"The chance to go on to the great beyond," said Borbich "The opportunity to merge once again with God "

Black snorted and said, "I was very interested for a while, but now that you are talking mystical nonsense, I think you'd better go I have other things to do besides babbling of Great Beyonds and of merging with the All-in-All "

"You don't understand" cried Borbich "If I use such terms, it is because I am forced to do so! Our language has no exact terms for the experiences and the goals of which I am speaking! So I must necessarily utilize the vocabulary of the mystic, inadequate and stammering and vague though it is. If you would allow me to explain "

"I have given you enough time," said Black "I may talk to you later P'raps. But whether or not we discuss the principles of your church, I must make one thing clear There will be no more talk about burning down the *Comet* or of laying down our arms, do you understand?"

"No, I don't," said Borbich "If you could give me the time, I'm sure I'd make perfectly clear to you why we must not resort to violence."

"I will give you no more warnings. One word out of you, and out of Theleme you go. Perhaps you'd like to talk to Murel."

Borbich paled and clenched his hands and then turned swiftly and ran down the stairwell. A moment later the first of the Councillors came up, and Black furiously engaged in shouting them down, forgot about Borbich.

16.

It was not until a half-hour later that he succeeded in silencing them. Despite all their angry arguments, he told them flatly that he could not now back out of the duel without regarding himself as a coward and losing face up and down the Valley.

Just as they all fell angrily silent, contesting themselves with hard stares and quick puffs upon their cigarettes, they heard drums from across The River.

"Dekanawidah sends greetings to his white brother Black."

That was the chief's standard opening. Black often wondered if the Cayuga were conscious of making the pun. The few times he had met the fellow in conference he had seen nothing on his face but the mask of impassible dignity. Black was not fooled by that, however, for he had had enough experience with preliterates to know that among themselves they were often anything but serious. And there was no bigger joker than your supposedly wooden-faced noble red man.

Black dictated to Barker his greetings to Dekanawidah. Then, impatient with the slowness of such methods, he asked that he be allowed to operate the drums himself. Though he was the originator of the MFA communication system, he had to work through the Grand Lodges. No one could touch a drum unless he received permission from the man on duty or from the Grandmaster.

Reeved gave his drummer cigarettes as a bribe, and then seated himself before the two instruments. He listened to the beats coming across the lake waters from a town not close to the banks. Then he pounded out a reply.

Did Dekanawidah know that he Black, was to meet O'Finn in a saber duel sometime this afternoon?

Dekanwidah knew.

Would the chief of the Cayuga have time to cross the lake to Theleme and observe in person the duel? And if so, would he care to bring along some of his noblest warriors After O'Finn had been killed, they could hold a conference

Yes Dekanawidah would like very much to witness his white brother, The-Man-With-The Jaw-That-Bites-Iron, take the scalp of O'Finn, The Redhaired-Loudtalker

And would Dekanawidah come prepared to talk of taking arms with the men of Black against the men of Murel?

Yes, Dekanawidah's son-in-law, Tsechan, had spoken to him of that and of Black's promise to deliver a certain amount of iron knives to the Cayuga But there had been no time as yet for a conference of the leaders of the tribe Moreover, the Dakota to the west, the men of Howling Dog, had just made an offer to the Cayuga They would like to join the confederation against Murel, but they would also like to receive for their help some iron knives from Black This required a certain amount of thought on the part of the Iroquois

Black groaned, for he needed the Cayuga now, and the Iroquois would hesitate at the idea of giving their enemies the invaluable knives, especially since they were probably plotting to use those very knives at a later time against Howling Dog's tribesmen They might take a week before they came to a decision By then, Theleme's need for them would probably be over, one way or the other

At that very moment, Black paused and grinned to himself He had an idea for forcing the Cayuga's hand, and it involved O'Finn If he could get the Murellian to insult the chief in any way . . .

He pounded out the message that he hoped to meet the sachem and his men at midnoon and that he would not be at ease until he had seen the greatness of Dekanwidah's face.

The Indian replied that he could not be happy again until he grasped the great Black's hand

Black laid down the bones and rose, but at that moment drums broke out to the west The garrison at the Red Rock blockhouse was reporting that the Vengeance had been sighted coming around the bend Black looked down at his feet. The overhead sun cast no shadow, it must be almost exactly noon, 0400 The Vengeance would take two more hours before it could drop anchor in the lake. That'd be 0600, the middle of the afternoon. Dekanawidah should arrive before or about then If he came on time. he wouldn't hold up the duel. Black wanted it to take place at 0630; it should be over within ten minutes, which would leave about an hour and twenty minutes before nightfall, which always dropped promptly at 0800.

Black was concerned about the time element because he planned an immediate attack upon the Vengeance He had O'Finn's word that the boat would surrender to Black if Black killed its captain. But O'Finn's word meant nothing; there was no doubt that the Vengeance would up-anchor and row out of the lake as fast as she could It would be his problem to catch it To do that. he had his own navy, the chief ship of which was the Dragon's Tooth It was a long low singlemasted boat that irresistibly reminded one of a Viking galley with its figurehead and its oars sticking out from between the round shields hung over the side Though not nearly as large as the Vengeance was reported to be, it could be used to delay the bigger vessel, especially since it would carry two dozen skilled archers who would shoot every man who showed his head above deck

Black told the drummer to ask the Red Rock Blockhouse if they had seen any signs of an unusual concentration of Murellians.

Red Rock reported that they had not, for the enemy's blockhouse displayed only the normal amount of life Nor had anyone made an effort to cross the two hundred yards of No Man's Land between the two posts

Black ordered the guard re-doubled at Red Rock Then he walked down the stairs to the ground floor and out into the hot and harsh sun of mid-day.

He was just in time to see Borbich's double-armed cross rise into the air and settle into its hole The Church's con-

verts, a group of twelve, then laid down the pikes with which they'd raised the heavy beams and began throwing dirt into the deep hole. As some tamped, others mixed cement formed of powdered limestone, sand, and pebbles, preparatory to pouring it around the base. Borbich himself stood to one side, plainly nervous, yet at the same time proud. His little eyes darted glances from side to side at the curious spectators; his ears were red with a mingled embarrassment and rage at their remarks.

Black ignored the group and walked to the great council table under the shade of the large pine. He sat down, opened his grail, removed the plates and cartons full of food and drink, and set them before him. The other councillors greeted him surlily or spoke not at all. Charbrass was the only exception for he, as usual, was cheery and indifferent to the decisions of others. If Black wished to risk both his life and Theleme's leader in a nonsensical duel, he would not object.

Black studied him. This man was a puzzle. If he was typical of the men of the twenty-first century then that period must have been a good one to live in. He was good-humored, intelligent, very well educated in some fields, though painfully lacking in others, capable of long periods of physical exertion, and, above everything, very well adjusted. Nothing threw him off stride or could upset his sense of timing. He always knew what to say and when to say it or when to keep quiet. He never volunteered for anything, yet, if he was asked to do such and such a thing or information was requested of him, he unhesitatingly consented. But never did he furnish more than was asked of him.

For instance, when Clemens and Black had been looking for an engineer to build their boat, they had talked of their need of one for a long time. He had listened to them, yet he had not offered his services. One day Black overheard Charbrass telling Phyllis that he had been a chief engineer on the Earth-Mars rocket run. Very much interested, Black had asked for more details, eventually he got the information that, if Charbrass had the minerals, he could construct an engine that would drive the paddlewheel of the *Comet*

Not only that, his advanced science would build them a powerful motor almost 85% efficient, even though they'd be using pine wood for fuel and fish fat for lubricants.

"Why didn't you tell us you could do this before?" Sam had shouted. "God damn it, you knew we needed a man like you!"

Charbrass had smiled, unabashed, and shrugged his shoulders. In his melodious and unhesitating speech, he had replied, "Nobody asked me."

And, despite Clemens' roars of disgust and Black's hoots of joy, Charbrass had smiled. He did not smile tolerantly; he smiled as if he enjoyed their emotions and understood them and, somehow, shared in them even more deeply than they themselves did. It was a curious feeling he managed to evoke. To a man like Black, who did not care too much for anybody to be breaking through his own guards, it was not an altogether likable feeling.

Now, watching him, Black wondered what other powers he possessed.

He said, "Jairus, as a twenty-first century man, what are your views towards this duel?"

Jairus Charbrass looked like a bronze statue of a god, slowly turning the question over in his brain so that an inner light would flash off its every facet. "I think that it is ridiculous and somewhat sad that any man should have to resort to violence."

"You sound like Borbich," said Black loudly. His black eyes struck out at the eyes of the other councillors, daring them to take issue with him.

"Perhaps I do," said Charbrass. "In some things, of course, I agree with him, though I do not care for his supernatural or theological explanations of the origins of this Valley. However, I think that his Church is on the right track in many respects."

"Then you do not approve of this duel?"

"Certainly, it has an advantage. If it removes O'Finn and others of his kind from the present scene, then you and the rest of Theleme will go that much faster towards your goal. However, you will only be putting upon somebody else's

shoulders the burden of O'Finn. And he will enact the same old mechanistic drama of murder, bluster, and lust for power. Why not try to tackle him in some other manner, in some way that will change him so that he will not be the same man but will be a better man?"

"Why not, indeed?" said Black ironically. "What would you suggest we do?"

"That is up to you," replied Charbrass. "It is no more my concern than yours."

"I go along with the majority as long as its action does not hurt my conscience. Most of them do not think I should fight O'Finn," Black said.

'Ah, but I think that you should do what you want to.'

Baffled, Black gazed fiercely at Charbrass, who calmly blinked back. There was no reasoning with a man like this.

"What then do you think of Borbich's statement that compassion is the chief—if not the only—law of human existence?"

"I think that there is much to be said for that view. But that Borbich, unfortunately, ties up too much of his energy trying to prove to himself what he has already stated does not need proving. Nor has he yet formulated a workable set of rules by which he may direct his compassion towards the goal. That goal, of course, is re-creating uncompassionate man, molding him into the compassionate. It will be a tremendous and lengthy job even if one knows what one is doing. Borbich is only dimly aware of what he must do. Yet this is not a cause for pessimism. I understand that he was even more chaotic and groping during his Earthly life and that he has progressed much during the twenty years in this Valley. He has conquered his epilepsy and his mania for gambling, though he still has some rather undesirable traits, one of which is too much self-abasement. This, as you know, is just the other side of the coin of pride. However, he has progressed.

"So have you, if I am to believe Phyllis and my own observations. Both you and Borbich work according to seemingly opposing principles and even different goals. But I believe that, at bottom, you have the same end in mind.'

The conversation which was usually dominated by Sam Clemens at one end of the table and Richard Black at the other, had died. All were listening to a new Charbrass, one they'd not known existed. The mere fact that a man could make Black listen to him, instead of vice versa, was enough to cause amazement.

"Indeed," pursued the engineer, "you are abandoning what you have so painfully and untiringly labored on for these last twelve years. You have built this little state of Theleme with its principles of a free democracy, and yet, just when it is beginning to work, you are leaving it to go on what may be a wild goose chase. You have built the Missing Persons Agency, which might become an organization through which we could bind together the whole Valley and disseminate democratic principles. In time we might impress English upon everybody and eventually make it a universal language, that of the Pax Thelemica. And when that is done, we might unite our efforts with those of the Church of the Second Chance and these other organizations that have been springing up—the Knights of the Grail, for instance, who want to practise twenty-first century psychodynamics and root out all neuroses and psychoses the length and breadth of the Valley."

"Wait a minute!" roared Black. "This is the first I've heard of that! And you sound as if you belonged to it! Why haven't you ever said anything about it before?"

"I am a member of the Knights of the Grail, yes," said Charbrass. "But not until recently. Do you remember that other twenty-first centurian who passed through here six months ago? A woman named Angela Day? She told me about it, and I asked her if I could join. She knighted me on the spot, and since then I've been waiting to hear from her. I haven't so far, but it must be because she's busily contacting others of my time. But when the organization is set up, you'll see things humming up and down The Valley. Oh, great things are in store."

"You sound like Borbich," said Black.

"It would be unkind of me to point out that you said that before," replied Charbrass, spooning out ice cream from his desert plate. "However, it is almost impossible for evangel-

ists, however different their education and aims, to keep a similar ring out of their words Just as soldiers of enemy armies use the same technical terminologies and adopt the same stiff bearing, so do missionaries of different faiths come to grow feathers much alike. Though I must admit I'm a rather pale imitation."

"Well, I'll be damned!" exploded Black. "A little Livingstone uncovered in the midst of the heathen barbarian!"

Some of the councillors laughed; others regarded Charbrass gravely and astoundedly.

Phyllis had sat down during the conversation; she reached across the table and patted the engineer's hand He looked tenderly at her and, though Black knew he was fond of everyone, her action and his response made him even angrier.

He did not show it, for he could not endure the thought that they would know how much he was affected So, clamping down upon the threatening internal explosion with a control that it had taken years to learn, he leaned back and lit up a cigarette, seemingly very calm and indifferent Only Phyllis knew what was taking place within him, and the knowledge that she was aware of it heated him even more. But he would not look at her Later, he would loose his rage upon her. Just now, he wished that O'Finn were present and ready with his saber, for he felt as if he could joyfully slash the man apart.

A little while later he was glad that O'Finn had not yet arrived, for he had cooled enough to realize that he would not have been at his best Fury was all right in its place, but he needed a clear-sighted energy, not this red-misted thing that had almost overcome him A man had to know exactly what he was doing, otherwise he ended up with the steel in his own guts, not in his antagonist's Now he worked off some of his drive by giving orders to Kelly about the disposition of his men during the duel. He also drafted about fifty more of the citizens as a guard of honor for the reception of the Cayuga sachem Black, besides being secretary of the Committee, was the commander-in-chief of Theleme's armed services.

"What about Red Rock?" asked Kelly, using the code

name for the blockhouse on the Theleme-Murellia border "Don't you think we should re-inforce it? Murel might try a raid across it while we're watching you and O'Finn."

"You may add another fifty men there," replied Black. "But I don't think there's a chance of a raid When Murel attacks, it will be with his entire army. And we know he's not moved any great number of men down The River, for our signalmen have reported that all is quiet along it No, I don't think he'll try all-out war just now. He's hoping that O'Finn will kill me. But he's going to be very disappointed."

Kelly saluted and left The rest of the afternoon, Black was busy trying to get all the day's business out of the way And he did not see Phyllis, which surprised him, for she had never before neglected her work. She was probably brooding in their hut, waiting for him to come home and apologize. Well, if that were so, she'd have a long wait

17.

At 0610, according to the hourglass which rested on the Council Table, Dekanawidah, Tsechan, and a group of fifty Cayugas paddled across the lake They came in two large canoes, each of which had ribs and keel of pine and a hull of several layers of human skin sewed together The sachem himself sat upon a little stool in the rear of the larger war-canoe. He was a big man with a bright jagged scar running down the left side of his face It was not the memento of a Sioux brave's flint knife, as he would have liked people to think, but was the result of an argument with his wife His slacks were a bright orange-red and came close to matching the scar His torso was bare except for a breastplate formed of knucklebones In his right hand he held a spear with a steel head, a gift from Black From his head band sprouted a number of artificial feathers formed of bone splinters for quills and strips of stiffened skin for barbs

The canoes slid upon the beach, and the Indians walked past a guard of honor to greet the Special Council After cigarettes had been traded back and forth, Black and Dekanawidah began talking of the possibility of forming a

temporary alliance with the Sioux After the white man saw that the sachem was far from making up his mind, he dropped the subject. At the moment, his main interest was in finding out how many warriors Dekanawidah could spare if Murel attacked.

"I haven't estimated them yet, but many will have to stay behind to guard our huts from the men of Howling Dog to the west and the Lemi-Lenape to the east

"Besides, we need many braves to watch over the slaves and see that they do not try to run away. They are becoming a problem, for every time one of my braves dies, he is replaced by a Hindu. A Hindu won't fight, and he is too treacherous and good for nothing to be adopted into the tribe Yet, his grail is a source of whiskey, and we can't allow him to just get up and walk away "

Some of the Thelemites frowned, for they had long been trying to work up a diplomatic plan on this subject with which they could approach the sachem They had hopes of educating the Cayugas to the point where they would voluntarily free their Asiatic Indian minority Eventually, the time would come when they would be forced to do so, for the dark skinned translatees composed ten per cent of their population. If the heavy death rate from warfare continued, the Cayugas would, within ten years, be one-quarter Hindu.

Their situation was, however, typical of The Valley Slowly, the mills of resurrection were mixing races and nations, grinding mankind from everywhere and everytime against each other The process was merely accelerated among the Amerindians on the southern bank because war was their favorite pastime.

Black asked Dekanawidah if he could make a broad guess at the number of warriors he could furnish Theleme The chief smacked his lips for an interminable time and then said that perhaps a drink would clear his mind enough for him to give an opinion.

At that moment the drum on the Castle's roof thundered All turned to see the *Vengeance* gliding around a wooded peninsula, a long black waterbug with fifteen stiff arms

upon each side digging into the water and thrusting it onwards. When it neared the middle of the lake, opposite the docks, its large size could be appreciated. It was at least a hundred feet long and five feet from waterline to deck. Two men handled each of the great oars, and its decks were crowded with spearmen and archers. A white shirt flapped in the breeze at the top of the fore-and-aft mast, but there were no flags or pennants. The prow bore a figurehead, a nude woman twice as large as life, roughly hewed from a pine trunk. A human skull was cradled in the valley of her breasts.

Drums rolled, the oars backwatered, the anchor, a boulder attached to a thick grass rope, dropped, a gig was lowered from the port side, four men rowed while the steerer chanted, a sixth stood erect in the bow. His red hair flashed in the sun, his scarlet face reminded Black of a baboon's buttocks. In a conch horn voice he roared out a demand that Black stand forth and greet the Admiral of the Navy of Murellia, Mike O'Finn hisself. He shook his head so that his gold-colored earrings, made from old lipstick cases, glittered. He was naked from the waist up, and his hairy chest shone orange-red. When he strode ashore, he plunged through the crowd and shouted, "Take me to yer boss, me friends!"

They looked blankly at him. He glared from under lion-yellow eyebrows and grabbed a girl by the shoulder. Her face twisted with pain.

"Now, that's a nice girl," he rumbled. "Show me this Blackman that rules over you whites, and I'll give ye a kiss."

White-faced, she stared silently at him. He licked his thick lips and with his other hand squeezed her breast. She screamed.

A man standing by her said, "You bastard!" and rushed at the scowling redhead. O'Finn bellowed, "Basthard, is it?" and kicked his attacker in the groin. The man fell writhing on the grass.

Black stepped lightly up and said, "You've gone too far O'Finn. You've put yourself beyond the pale of the truce."

"So, it's the Blackman hisself? Well, me bhoy, ye're up the creek without a paddle if ye think I'm here to discuss a threaty with ye. I'm here for one reason, and that is to tell ye from Boss Murel to surrendher at once, and be threated nicely, or else have yer guts wrapped around yer necks. If ye surrendher at once, then you, Black, can keep on ruling Theleme as Murel's vice-roy. Otherwise ..."

He passed his finger across his throat.

Black smiled and said, "If all his men are like you, O'Finn, we have nothing to worry about. Big windbags make a great amount of noise, but they can be deflated easily enough. It takes only a pinprick."

The crowd laughed. The redhead's face became even more flushed. Abruptly, he pulled his saber from its skin scabbard. Black's eyes narrowed, for he knew that it must have been stolen from Theleme or else taken from a Cayuga during a battle.

O'Finn shouted, "Big talk, Blackie, but it don't scare me none. Ye'll run like the rest o' them when Boss Murel and his buckos come with their five thousand swordhs like these."

"You are lying, O'Finn, for there can't be more than four or five such blades in all Murellia, all stolen. But that doesn't matter. What does is that I'm giving you a chance to live. Hand over your saber, and I'll allow you to go back to Murel and tell him we're ready for him."

"What! Give ye me steel swordh, next to me family jewels and me tallywhacket me most threasured possession? Are ye daft, Blackie? No, ye'll have to kill me in combat, fair or foul."

"Very well," replied Black.

He looked around him. The crew of the *Vengeance*'s gig were standing to one side, behind their captain. They were shifty-eyed, and their hands were resting on the weapons stuck in their belts, all of which consisted of stone knives or axes. The Thelemites were spreading out in a large semicircle which faced the docks and the two antagonists. The Cayugas stood in a knot upon the closest wharf. Their faces were grave, and their arms were folded on their chests.

It was then that he saw Phyllis, at the far eastern end of the crowd. She was pale, and her hands were clasped together. Even so, she tried a brief and tight smile at him.

Anne de Celnos was just behind her and a little to one side. Her large brown eyes were upon him, but she was smiling in a cool ironic manner as if she thought the situation was ridiculous and he was not very mature if he took part in it.

He was irked. Her attitude was, rationally speaking, the correct one, yet it was not one that he found to his liking. Phyllis, he thought, was reacting as the woman who loved him should.

Abruptly, he dismissed them from his mind and turned to the Cayugas.

"Dekanawidah, brother, will you referee this duel? If O'Finn kills me, will you see that no one interferes with what he does to my body? And that he gets back to the boat safely?"

"I will do that," said the sachem.

"What about the men who came with me?" roared O'Finn. "Don't they get the same guarantee of passage?"

"All of you will be allowed to return to your boat. But once that is done, you'll have to fight your way from the lake."

"Sure, and how do I know these redh-skinned haithens won't scalp me? I can't thrust them no more'n I can you!"

Dekanawidah's face darkened, and he muttered something under his breath. Black smiled, for he had purposely led O'Finn to make a derogatory remark about the Indians. There was no surer way of enlisting them for the Thelemite cause.

He said, "You talked boldly enough a moment ago. If you didn't trust us, why did you venture among us?"

"Enough o' this blarney. Let's fight, Blackie. Out wi' yer steel and fall to!"

Black removed his shirt and then swished his saber through the air in a few practise cuts. Afterwards, he examined its point. He had had its back or false edge, ordinarily

dull, ground to a razor sharpness It was a device that had often served him well.

"On guard, O'Finn," he said, and he advanced.

His opponent waited for him, spraddle-legged and bent-kneed. He was taller than Black's own six feet, and his shoulders and chest were thicker. His paunch, however, was swollen from years of heavy eating and drinking and promised a short wind.

Black circled, hoping to make O'Finn face the westering sun It was, he estimated, a few minutes before seven. Nightfall would come in another hour He wanted to kill the man quickly so he could take advantage of the daylight left for an attack upon the *Vengeance.*

O'Finn, however, knew that Black was trying to get him to look into the glare. He grinned, and, with a scream intended to startle Black, ran at him His blade clanged on his enemy's, and a shock ran up the Thelemite's arm, for he had been given a mighty stroke. But Black successfully parried and returned as good as he got O'Finn's expression showed that his own arm had been half-numbed. He was fighting against a man who, in the daily practise upon the Mart, managed with monotonous regularity to knock his antagonist's saber from his hand with one paralyzing stroke.

O'Finn recovered and attacked again A few more terrific but wild cuts from him affirmed Black's guess that the man was no artist at saberwork. Though the Irishman had a reputation for being deadly with a knife or a staff, he knew little of swordsmanship. Or, if he did, he had not had the self-discipline to become a master at it

Black decided not to waste any time playing around with him. A quick victory was needed so that the *Dragon's Tooth,* the Thelemite wargalley, could try to intercept the *Vengeance* before it left the lake. Ezekiel Hardy and his crew had been ordered to wait at their stations on the ship The moment O'Finn was killed, they were to push their vessel from the dock and attack the Murellian If, however, the duel lasted until close to night-time, the *Vengeance* would have a better chance of getting away in the dark

Black had been allowing the Irishman to take the initia-

tive As he backed away, slow step by step, he had studied the man's style, watching for weaknesses Now, he surged forward, beating with such hard strokes that his enemy's numbed hand almost dropped his weapon. Suddenly, a backstroke sliced half of O'Finn's ear off

The redhead jumped back, bellowing, then, gathering his forces for a desperate onslaught, hurled himself forward Black parried the whirling cage of slashes that O'Finn built before him and then, ignoring orthodox swordsmanship, thrust his saber's point as he would have a rapier's It drove into the barrel-chest opposite him, and when it withdrew, a bright red pumped out to mingle with the orange-red hair.

Unfortunately, O'Finn, who did not know that you were not supposed to do such things, had also extended his point. Though partly deflected, it sliced through Black's neck muscle, just beyond his collarbone

Maddened, Black brought up from his bag of tricks his favorite. It began with a skillful *manchette*, a cut delivered at O'Finn's forearm in *carte*, or inside, with an almost horizontal slash. Then, as his foe parried, he twisted his saber, bringing the sharpened back edge against the Irishman's wrist A quick hard withdrawal severed the tendons O'Finn's blade dropped from his crippled hand.

The crowd yelled exultantly The Irishman crouched, holding his arm while blood welled from his half-ear and pumped from his chest Black took a step forward to deliver the *coup de grace* Screaming, O'Finn ran headlong for the docks.

The Cayugas standing before him parted and formed an aisle Down it rushed the wounded man and close behind him was Black, intent on catching him and finishing him off.

And when his quarry dived off the end of the wharf into the waters, he followed him, his knife in his teeth He hoped to overhaul him before he swam to the *Vengeance* If he did that, there'd be a good chance of delaying the ship Otherwise, if O'Finn outdistanced him, he'd order up-anchor and oars out, leaving his own five sailors stranded on the shore.

Seemingly incommoded by his wounds, O'Finn thrashed like a madman Black swam easily and powerfully, trusting that the man would quickly lose strength and slow down Nor was he disappointed, for halfway between the shore and the galley, the Irishman stopped and bellowed out to the ship.

The sailors aboard it sprang into activity They seized the end of a rope which hung from a block and pulley attached to the mast, hooked it onto something on deck, and began pulling Like the jaw of a whale, a large section of planking arose, and out of it boiled a mob of soldiers

Simultaneously, the oarsmen leaped to the handles of their great sweeps, and a sailor slashed the anchor rope so that the grass fibers parted Slowly, the *Vengeance* slid forward, towards the man struggling in the water and ultimately towards the beach.

18.

If Black had not been so filled with rage because he had fallen into a trap, he would have turned for the shore at once. But he was determined that he would at least destroy the bait O'Finn was not going to brag afterwards that he had fooled him so completely and then escaped

Within six strokes he caught up with him The man was in a bad way The water around him was stained red, and his face had lost its scarlet hue.

"I throw meself on yer mercy, Black," he croaked

At the same time he cast a glance over his shoulder to see how fast the *Vengeance* was coming up

Black smiled grimly and said, "How much mercy will I get if your men capture me?"

"This much!" shouted O'Finn as he reared out of the water and stabbed with a knife that must have been hidden beneath his slacks for just such a situation

Black had taken his own blade from between his teeth barely in time He parried and then dived deep Something struck his shoulder, and he presumed that he was wounded again, but he did not think he had been hurt very much He kept on swimming downwards until he could see noth-

ing in the murky depths. Then he curved upwards until, perceiving O'Finn's feet kicking above him, he seized them and pulled the man under.

Suddenly, O'Finn went limp. Refusing to be taken in by such a trick, Black slid his knife into the lower intestines twice. Convinced by then that the Irishman wasn't playing possum, he ran his hand over the body. An arrow was sticking from the back of the neck.

The captain's own men, firing wildly to save him, had instead struck him. And Black, by diving to avoid the treacherous knife, had unknowingly escaped the shafts. Probably that blow on his shoulder just as he went down had been from a spent arrow.

He broke surface, gulped air, and dived again. There was time for a quick look, and he did not like what he saw. The galley was almost upon him, so close that the edge of a huge oar smashed into the water only a foot from his face.

It was not that that bothered him so much. It was what was taking place on shore. In that swift glance around he had seen that a widespread battle was raging there. Nor could he understand it, for the five men left by O'Finn's desertion would not have put up that much resistance.

Again he dived deep, deep, and curved beneath the *Vengeance*'s flat bottom and long oars to emerge far on the other side.

Though the galley blocked part of his view, he could see enough to determine where the attackers on the beach were coming from. Hundreds were still streaming down from the hills and through the little valley at the bottom of which a little creek ran. Evidently a large war party of Murel's men had sneaked at night through the hills and hidden there until the duel. Then, just as O'Finn's flight had taken up the attention of the Thelemites, they had burst upon them from the rear.

Moreover, there was a horde streaming from the western border, a body of men that he estimated must number at least three thousand. Evidently they had managed to conceal themselves so effectively that the Red Rock blockhouse had not had a hint of their presence. Nor, he thought bit-

terly, had his signalmen perched up in the mountains been able to spot them.

In the next moment he forgot his speculations, for he saw the Titanthrop that Hickok had spoken of. The creature was terrifying. He towered almost twice the height of the largest man, and he bore easily a great shield that would have floored a Hercules and swung a stone axe whose head looked like a boulder.

Black groaned and then put the knife back in his scabbard and began swimming towards the shore. Arrows from the galley plunged into the water around him, but all wide of their mark. The pine bows of the Murellians were to be dreaded only at close range.

Black heard a loud chanting and the beating of tom-toms. Suddenly, around the galley's bow shot a Cayuga warcanoe. Dekanawidah was seated in its stern, directing the craft in its search for Black. Within a minute he was hauled aboard, and the canoe had turned around to chase the *Vengeance*.

"We'll have to fight our way back into the Castle," panted Black. "There are too many of Murel's men concentrated in this one place for us to stand outside and defeat them. Once inside the Castle, we can hold them off indefinitely, and that will give us time to rally our citizens who are now scattered all along the lake."

"I can't go into the Castle with you," replied the sachem. "My men would think I was a coward. I will help you fight until you get inside, and then I must go back across The River."

"It will only be until morning. P'raps it'd be best if you returned immediately to your land, gathered your braves, and launched an attack the moment dawn comes. If we could squeeze Murel between an attack from the Castle, my people to the east, and you . . ."

A mighty noise from shorewards drowned out his voice. Startled, he looked up to see the midships of the *Dragon's Tooth* receiving the full impact of the *Vengeance*'s bow. Prow and side crumpled in, planks split with a whiplike crack, there was a louder snap as the larger galley's mast

broke off at its base; a crash as it fell forward upon the decks of both vessels.

Screams arose from the soldiers and sailors who had been thrown down on their craft's decks and had been piled three deep in some places. At least four hundred men had been hidden in her hold, jammed together, part of them had poured out when the action began only to be slammed upon her hard planks or cast headlong over the railings and into the waters.

Black said, exultantly, "Hardy must have deliberately turned broadside to the *Vengeance*. Good man! Now the *Vengeance* will be out of commission for some time. Look there, Dekanawidah! Both ships are sinking!"

The sachem urged his paddlers to close up the gap between his canoe and the vessels. And his other warboat was sliding among the strugglers in the lake, its clubmen knocking the helpless Murellians over the head. They were joined by their fellows, and the air over the waters became hideous with the yells of the slaughterers and the screams of the butchered.

Black, impatient to join his men ashore and seeing that the Cayugas had forgotten their original intention of setting him down on the beach, dived away. He swam a short distance, his feet touched bottom, and he waded only a little ways before he was among men up to their waist in water, fighting desperately.

He stabbed a Murellian in the back, caught the stone axe that fell from the limp hand, and shouted. "Around me, Thelemites! Around me!"

He swung viciously at a man's face and saw it break into red fragments.

"Around Black! Fight your way to the Castle! Around Black!"

Abruptly, as if a magical charm had summoned them, several of his men had gathered behind him. One offered him a saber. He threw his axe at a big blacknaired man, seized the saber, said, "Thanks," and waded towards the man who had ducked the axe. That one thrust at him with a flint spear. Black chopped off the stone head and drove

his saber's point into the man's throat Then he was out of the water, still loudly calling, "Around Black!"

The cry arose, "Around Black! Gather around Black!".

As if they'd popped up from the trampled and blood-stained grass of the Trade Mart, men and women appeared in a large and dense body behind him They were a wedge, he was their point His saber slashed and parried with the mastery given by fifty years of practice combined with the arm of a powerful twenty-five year old youth Those who stabbed at him went down with amputated arms or severed necks, though he did not get by untouched, he was bleeding from a dozen places, but none were deep wounds

Moreover, when his group was halfway across the Mart, and their situation was most desperate, steel-tipped arrows, hard driven by steel bows, began plunging into the Murellians on their flanks A bunch of archers had climbed to the top of the Castle, and another to the foredeck of the *River Comet*, and they caught those below in a crossfire

It was an unfortunate position for the bowmen on top of the half-built boat, for they were later cornered and forced to leap into the water, but at the moment they were doing great damage They rarely missed, sometimes their shafts plunged all the way through one man and into another.

All the while he was slashing, Black was searching for Anne and Phyllis Finally, as he was about twenty yards from the doorway of the Castle, he saw the Frenchwoman She was on her back and underneath a little man who was trying to force his knife against her throat Though her two hands gripped the wrist of his bladehand, they were weakening The sharp flint was slowly lowering towards her The little man, however, was also losing strength that was running fast from a hole in his shoulder Anne had not gone down without first doing some damage

Black bounded towards the couple and cut the man's neck in half Anne lacked the energy to pull herself from under the body which lay atop her, drenching her with blood He rolled the corpse over and raised her to her feet

"Where's Phyl?" he shouted.

She shook her head and moaned Her hands kept going

out in front of her as if she were still trying to push the knife away.

He directed her towards the open gateway and turned to fight again. By then many of the men on the foundered *Vengeance* had scrambled ashore and were helping their fellows. Not only that, the vanguard of those who had charged across the border were just reaching the fray. At their head was Joe Caveman, that monster from the dawn of man. He stood at least ten feet high and must have weighed a thousand pounds. His enormous brown-skinned body, which was quite human, was covered thinly with long rusty red hairs. His face was half-ape's, half-man's, and it looked humorously grotesque with the long long nose sticking out from it, so much like a proboscis monkey's. The pupils of his eyes were an innocent blue, but the whites were streaked with red, the red of whiskey and murderlust. He was worth twenty men as he strode along, his huge shield guarding his left side and his ponderous stone axe swinging, knocking down shields, spears and sabers and shattering skulls and collar bones and ribs and ribs and arms in a sickler's sweep.

Black, seeing this, roared out to the archers on top of the Castle, "Shoot the apeman! Don't pay attention to anything else! Shoot him!"

The general din was such that he could not be heard, but his order wasn't needed. A tower of a man like that was an archer's dream. Within a minute three shafts thunked into the wooden shield, one grazed his thickboned skull, one pierced his shoulder and another cut off a little toe.

Joe Caveman roared with pain and turned and ran to a safe distance where he removed the arrow from his shoulder. A tall man with long curly blond hair and wearing skyblue slacks and a black patch over his right eye, walked up to him and said a few words. Then he called several men to bind the monster's wounds. Black supposed that he was Murel. He wished it were possible to fight through the melee to him, but he knew that he'd be lucky to get most of his force inside the Castle.

He did it, but it took ten more minutes of furious and bloody work. Then, at a signal from him, the great iron

portcullis slammed down from overhead, pinning three of the invaders beneath it Immediately after, the thick pine, iron-plated gates swung shut and were barred from inside

Black ran up the steps and into the room whose floor was over the long hall leading to the gateway There was a trapdoor here, and through it he could see the invaders tightly packed beneath him where they had been when the portcullis closed They had charged into the passageway and now, foiled, they were standing there, waiting for orders from Murel Before they could get away, Black told the four men who were stationed there to dump the huge kettle of boiling water upon them They pulled the pin which released the fast dumping mechanism on which the kettle rested It tilted with a great thump that shook the floor, and poured out through the trapdoor The screams of those beneath it told how effectively, and awfully, the trap had worked Those on the outside areas, though untouched, tried to get away at once, the result was a pile up in the passageway in which more men were trampled to death than were burned

When that bit of grisly work was done Black turned his attention to counting heads Doctors Winters and Steinberg were taking care of the wounded as best they could his own wounds could be attended to later He had to know what the situation was

Nightfall had come swiftly The torches were lit He went through room after room, checking, making sure that every embrasure was guarded, and he ended his tour upon the rooftop Here he found Wild Bill staring out over the Trade Mart.

"We're not in very good shape," said the frontiersman "They've got the *Comet,* and they're attacking the blockhouse at the pass, and they're smoking out everybody that's hiding."

There were drums beating from the pass, throbbing with the message that they'd been able to hold off the attackers but that if this kept up, they'd go down before long Though Murel's men were being killed fast as they came they had too many men and didn't care how many they lost.

All over the hillsides fires were springing up, a thousand fires from the huts of the citizens. Every now and then they could hear screams as a man or woman was dragged out from a hiding place in the woods or tried to run out from a flaming hut. The man's shouts were usually brief; the woman's lasted much longer.

Hickok shook his long locks sadly. "If them women want to escape being raped, they'd better commit suicide."

He looked quickly at Black.

"Where's Phyl?"

"She's not in the building," said Black. Something seemed to be rising in his breast and threatening to choke off his breath.

"God *damn!*" Tears ran down Hickok's face, glinting in the flicker of the torches. "God *damn!*"

Hickok walked away to a dark corner. Black questioned Kelly.

Kelly said, "I saw Phyllis knocked out and lying in the Mart. Whether she's there among them, I can't say." He pointed to the many bodies crumpled here and there on the grass, four stories below them. Torches bobbed everywhere like nervous stars as Murel's men searched among the corpses.

"There is nothing we can do about her yet," said Black. "What's the general situation?"

"I'd say we've suffered heavily. We lost over two hundred in the fighting around the Castle. About five hundred of us got in, there're about sixty too wounded to be any good for fighting in the immediate future. Some of us had to abandon our grails outside so we'll have to ration our food, though I think there's enough to go around without starving us. As for the outside, only those who escaped over the eastern border or are hiding up in the hills got away. Oh, yes, there's fifty stationed at the pass blockhouse and one hundred men working at The Mine."

"If Dekanawidah attacks, he can bring two thousand braves to bear," said Black. "The question is, will he? He's nervous about the Sioux, and he might leave half of his force to guard his borders."

"Dekanawidah won't be leading them," said Kelly. "He was killed by a spear thrown from the *Vengeance*. I saw it myself."

Black raised his thick eyebrows. "Then we'll probably be dealing with Tsechan. That's all to the better. He has always wanted to tie Theleme and the Cayugas into a league."

"Yes, if he wasn't killed, too," said Kelly, gloomily. "I didn't see what happened after that, for I was too busy hacking my way back to the Castle."

"We'll find out soon enough," replied Black.

He was staring at a group of a dozen torch bearers collected at one spot to throw a more brilliant light. Within its radiance stood the tall yellow-haired man with the black patch over his left eye. He was leaning on a steeltipped lance, taken from a dead Thelemite.

At the same time that Black looked at him, the one-eyed man raised his head. As if the two were of opposite poles, and so bound to attract each other, their eyes met. It was remarkable, for Black's features could not have been very distinguishable in the flickering light of the torches that reached up for four stories. Yet Murel seemed to know at once that his archfoe was watching him. He handed his lance to a man, and put his hands around his mouth as a megaphone and bellowed that he would like to talk with Black. Would he guarantee not to shoot at him if he came closer for a parley?

Black shouted back that he would promise not to shoot until Murel had returned to the spot where he now was.

Murel, surrounded by six torchmen and several of his lieutenants, walked up to a position almost directly below Black. Hickok pointed to another tall man whose yellow hair fell down to his shoulders. He was carrying a chest of pinewood shaped like a hat box.

"That's Tom Custer," he said.

Murel shouted up, "Black, I've something to show you!"

Custer opened the lid of the chest and removed an object which he held up by the hair.

"Hey, Black, how do you like that pumpkin head?"

He laughed, and his men dutifully echoed

Hickok swore and said, "It's Burke, the manager of our MPA."

As if he had heard him, Murel said, "Dam right, it's Burke But he's not going to report to you He's been severed from duty."

Again he laughed, and his followers whinnied

"Perhaps you'd like to know how I succeeded in getting my forces into a position for a surprise attack without your signal posts being able to inform you? It was rather easy, Black I knew that Hickok was spying on us, because Custer told me he recognized him But instead of taking him and torturing him, I allowed him to return to you so you would have a false sense of security "

Hickok groaned and muttered, "It's all my fault, Dick All my fault. I should have killed Custer as soon as I saw him."

"Not only that," continued Murel, "I had one of my men give him a partially false story, and when Hickok returned to you, I at once ordered my men on the move We kept behind him, of course, because we couldn't travel as fast as he could. One by one we surprised your outposts in the hills before they could signal you We put our own men on the drums. We tortured the code from your men and then afterwards killed them The messages you have been getting were sent by my own drummers The *Vengeance* was loaded with my boys They laid on specially built racks, and the force that attacked you from the rear, from the hills, has been hiding there a week, waiting for the *Vengeance* to appear And everything worked as planned Your duel with O'Finn occupied everybody's attention enough for us to launch our three-pronged attack It has been, as you can see, most successful And I might add, that, if you're depending upon help from the Cayugas, you are not likely to get it I have an alliance with the Sioux, temporary to be sure, but effective for the moment, an alliance whereby they will attack the Cayuga in the morning For their aid I have promised Howling Dog that I will give him a hundred sabers and a like number of helmets and axes, plus twenty-

five bows and three hundred steeltipped arrows. Of course, I will do no such thing, but by the time he finds that out, it will be too late."

Black thought at once of warning Tsechan by drum of the expected Sioux attack, but he was restrained by one thought. What if Murel were lying about that and wanted Black to signal the Cayuga? He could plan that such a statement would keep the Cayuga on their side of the lake, waiting in a highly nervous state for the Sioux.

In a quick aside to Kelly, he told him to send a message to Tsechan as soon as the conference finished. He was to tell Tsechan that it was probably a trick on Murel's part, but that he should, if possible, leave men on the western border. Nevertheless, his help was needed badly.

Murel had waited for Black to give an answer. Seeing that none was coming, he continued, "Black, you're an intelligent man, even if you did fall stupidly into my trap. I don't want to prolong this siege, or to lose any more men than I have to. You know what will happen to you if I storm the Castle and take you alive. So I suggest that you surrender at once. If you do so, I promise not to harm anybody now in the Castle. Not only that, but Clemens may remain as captain of the *River Comet*, and you can take over O'Finn's place. I need men like you, Black, strong and ruthless. You and I could become top kingpins in this Valley. we could quit being rulers of penny-ante states and spread our power up and down the length of this River. Think of it, Black! We'd rule more people than any of the ancient conquerors ever did! Genghis Khan, Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, none of them'd hold a candle to us."

Black was impressed, though he knew the last two names only through having heard Phyllis speak of them. He appreciated the man's colossal ambition, but at the same time he pitied him. Didn't he know that even if he gained his impossible objective, he'd still have nothing he could hold on to? Here in the Valley a tyrant was always at the mercy of his people no matter how secure he appeared. Somebody could always be found who'd be willing to assassinate him, because he knew that death did not mean the end of his life. Only on a rather small scale was a gangster state

possible—at least in this section of the Valley. And Murel's rested on the fact that it had been founded among a group who did not have the guts to resist. Moreover, the bully chieftain's power was based upon the men who did his dirty work for them, and they, like any Pretorian guard, were fickle and liable to change their minds about whom they wanted to rule them. Didn't Murel know that, or was he so blinded by his grandiose schemes that he couldn't see it?

Murel's next words showed that he had given some thought to the problem, for he spoke about the *Comet*.

"I know you have a man among you called Charbrass, and that he comes from the twenty-first century. He is the one who has built the engine for your ship and he could, I have no doubt, build many other machines for you. You have the iron, and with his technological skills and an expansion of your MPA as a spy system, and several boats like the *Comet* we could rule any section we choose. Why, once that steam-driven machinegun is finished, there will be no horde that could stand against us."

Murel turned his head so that his single eye glowed in the torchlight like a doorway to hell.

"What do you say, Black? I'm a man who likes quick decisions, and I know you're the one who can give them. What is it? Surrender and a glorious future, or resistance and a slow and painful death?"

Black was silent, poised on the ramparts, the crenellation beside him throwing shadows that seemed like great brooding wings rising from his shoulders, his brow bent and his face set into heavy thought, his whole aspect that of a dark Lucifer faced with the decision of whether to be king of Tartarus or not.

Anne de Celnos' soft voice whispered from the darkness behind him. "Dick, you're not thinking of surrendering, are you?"

Hickok said, "You don't know him well enough, ma'am. He'd never surrender, even if he had the authority. he'd have to put up the vote to the General Council. But he wouldn't do it even if they voted to throw down our arms."

Impatient, Murel spoke again.

"I'll show you something that may change your mind, Black."

He gestured to someone far behind him. Suddenly, torches flared, and about fifty yards away, two prisoners were revealed. Borbich and Phyllis.

19.

"Black!" shouted Murel. "If you decide to come in with me, these two will be unharmed! But if you hold out for a siege, I'll crucify this religious fanatic to his own double cross, and what happens to the woman you may guess!"

He gestured, and his men turned the prisoners around and marched them off.

"I'll give you until dawn, Black. Until then, sweet dreams."

For a moment, Black was tempted to give the order to his archers to shoot Murel. They would not have missed, and the death of their leader might be such a demoralizing blow to his men that they would not have the heart to carry out the siege.

On the other hand, his followers would undoubtedly torture Borbich and Phyllis. And, as long as Murel lived and Black still had time to act, there was hope.

He dropped the hand he had half raised to summon the captain of his bowmen and turned to go back down to the Castle. And he bumped into Anne.

Even in the surprise of that encounter, he felt a thrill go through him at the touch of the soft curves and the sight of her deep brown eyes. And, at the same time, he felt the countercurrent of shame and resentment that he could feel such an emotion at a time when Phyllis was in danger.

"Oh, Dick, I'm sorry, really sorry," she whispered. "Poor Phyllis. It's awful, what she has waiting for her. I know what they'll do."

"So do I," he said, "but I can't allow myself to feel sorry for her. That would drive me out of my mind. And, after all, whatever pain and indignity she'll endure will last only so long, after that, she'll be free of Murel, in another part of the Valley."

"But," said Anne, "that will be the greatest torture to her of all, the knowledge that she will probably never see you again. Don't you think that will drive her crazy?"

"It will make her unhappy, yes," he replied, aware for the first time of a muscle twitching at the corner of his lip. "But she's adjustable and stable; she'll get over this great passion and find another man and, in time, forget about me and be very much in love with him. Why should she be any different than any other woman?"

"Do you know," said Anne, "you are repeating exactly my own philosophy. Yet, when I hear it from your lips, it sounds faintly disgusting."

"Then you've no faith in your own beliefs," he said. "However, that's not the point. I want to get Phyllis away from Murel, or, if that's impossible, make certain he can't harm her."

"Do you mean that you'd kill her first?"

"That's exactly what I mean."

He brushed by her and walked to Charbrass, who was superintending the checking of the air-driven catapult. The engineer was bent over, and he did not look up as Black's shadow fell across him. Yet Black had the feeling that the man knew very well who was standing behind him and could even foretell what Black's first words would be.

"Jairus," Black said, "I wasn't present last week when you tested this engine out. What's its range?"

Charbrass straightened up, a wrench in his bronzed hand. He flashed a grin and said, "It will fire a two hundred pound object from here to the edge of the Trade Mart."

"Luckily," said Black, "Murel doesn't seem to know the range of the catapult, otherwise his men wouldn't stroll about so carelessly within range. Then again, he may just be heedless, or he may be inviting us to use it so he can learn its range. Meanwhile, we'll proceed on the assumption he doesn't know."

Black studied the catapult. Squat and powerful, it rested on its wheeled platform. Its square nose pointed at a thirty degree angle upward, though it could be cranked up to forty-five. Its body formed a ten foot greased runway for

the object which would be propelled by powerful steam pistons. Charbrass had already built a fire in the boiler of the little steam engine, but he was not trying to get up much pressure. If they were in for a long siege, they had to be careful of their water supply.

"I'm glad," said Black, "that we hadn't transferred the cat to the *Comet*. We're in a bad enough state without Murel's being in possesion of this."

Charbrass' smile was a flash of white in a cheerful bronze mask. He seemed the only relaxed tenant of the besieged Castle. But when he saw a ripple of resentment run across Black's face, he sensed at once what was wrong.

"You must forgive me," he said, "if I seem to be indifferent to your sufferings or Phyllis' fate. I am not. I heard your talk with Murel and your conversation with Anne and Bill. I agree with you in what you said about Phyllis' pain lasting only a short while and then being wiped out in death. But I knew you were not as unconcerned as you seemed to be. I knew you were presenting in logical terms how you felt you *should* feel. And you were doing so in order to hide your emotional feelings. That's a mistake, you know; you shouldn't cut yourself in two and say to others that one part is you and the other is not. If you persist in doing that, the time will come, if it hasn't already, when the two parts *will* be separate. They'll then be beyond the control of your will. And you won't be a whole man, but a ragged man, a fabric torn and tattered, beyond the help and understanding of yourself and of others. You don't want to be that, Dick. You've changed for the better during your days in this Valley, that is, until recently. Then something entered into you, or something long hidden erupted and had to come out. Your love for Phyllis became changed, you thought you loved Anne. And the constantly growing obsession to penetrate to the River's headwaters . . ."

"What's the matter with you, Charbrass?" growled Black. "This hardly seems the time and place for an exposure of my soul. What's more, I'm surprised that you should be doing it. I've known you these twelve years, and not until a few days ago did you start talking in this manner, talking

as if you'd stored up the wisdom of the ages and now had to loose it or burst."

Charbrass smiled again and turned up his palms in a gesture of mingled humility and dismay.

"This Valley is Hell and I am a damned man," he said. "And the dam must now and then spill over or burst. Else I *am* damned."

"You're a queer chap," said Black. "I think I've always sensed it, but not until recently has it come out in the open. This crisis, I suppose, has done it."

"You can't say I'm hysterical," said Charbrass, grinning. He bent down again to the bolt he had been working on.

"I wonder if you're typical of the men of your time," said Black. "I've only met one other twenty-first centurian, and she didn't seem at all like you."

Charbrass didn't answer, and Black, after a snort of impatience, walked away. He was thinking, however, that he knew extraordinarily little of the man after years of close living with him. It was all the more remarkable in that his eager mind drove him to learn all he could about anybody he came into contact with. Charbrass' case was, however, different in that he knew little of the man himself. From him, he had absorbed an enormous number of facts in the form of history, philosophy, and anthropology, and the technology and psychology of his times. But of his personal life, Black had gleaned few items.

Phyllis herself had once commented on that, but she had said that he was typical of the man of his time and possesed what was known as the "evasive character."

"You must remember," Phyllis had said, "that he is descended from a people who were used to open spaces and privacy. In his time, the Earth had not yet been repopulated, and he had spent his early childhood on Mars, where there was nothing but elbow space outside of the domed cities."

The conversation had been diverted from personalities at this point because Black was intensely curious to find out about Earth's "repopulation." It was then that he had heard of the cobalt bombs that had killed all life on Earth and of

how, after Earth had once again become free of the deadly radiation, it had been settled by those Tellurians who had struggled along on Mars until it was safe to return to the mother planet.

"And how did these prodigal sons come out?" Black had asked.

"You know, that's a funny thing," Phyl had replied. "As far as I know, the record of mankind ends with the return to Earth There is no twenty-second century man along the river—at least I've heard of none. And Charbrass, who was resurrected close to River's End, met none."

Ah, yes, thought Black as he walked down the stairwell, that was another thing For River's End was a passage of terror, a passage of *no*-passage for mankind There the mighty waters narrowed and plunged into towering, unscalable mountainsides, down rapids and falls on which no boat could possibly survive and into mists which none could penetrate. The end of The River was as violent and mysterious as the end of the old Earth had been

But, he thought with sudden exultation, there yet remained the headwaters. That way was not barred; a man had seen it and returned to tell the tale. Somewhere at the far, far other end was a mighty tower of shining white metal that reared up from a mountainside where it had been covered until a landslide had unveiled it, a monstrous grail upon an island in the midst of a lake from which poured the grandfather of all rivers.

Grail Lake. Mist. Headwaters Quest

He knew about the quest for ancient and lost lakes which gave birth to ancient and mighty rivers. He had once searched for such a lake in his Earth life, and he had become sick, and another had gotten the credit, and he had mistaken another lake for the source of that river Nor had he ever seen the true headwaters—only the false. And he had died, and here he was on the banks of another river and hoping desperately that he could go upstream, against the current, following all its windings, go against incalculable odds and someday see the big grail and the heart of the mountains, where the fresh waters spurted out in a mist and

a roar. And there he would somehow find out how to enter the big grail and would pierce through to the mysteries of this world, this far-off planet with its high peaks and its swift days and nights and its hot yellow sun and stars as great as exploding rockets and mundane resurrection and grails with their daily miracles of bread and wine and Lucky Strikes and always the how and why and whence and whither. . .

". . . goest thou?" said a voice.

Black was startled, but he replied calmly to Anne as if he had seen her all along and she had not just become visible to the inner eye.

"I'm checking the Castle before I try to get a little sleep Dawn will be here in two hours, and I imagine that we'll get no rest for a long time after that."

"If there wasn't anybody around," Anne murmured, "I'd kiss you. But since there are, I'll tell you about my little problem."

"What's that?"

"Since Dr Winters put me in charge of sanitation, I've been worrying about getting rid of refuse As it happens, we've quite an amount. We can't walk out and throw it away, as we once did, and if we pour the stuff out the windows, the stench will become unbearable."

"Put it in one of those big skinbags," he said, "and we'll catapult it into the river tomorrow Or maybe drench our enemies with it. It won't be a fatal missile, but it'll be nasty!"

They both laughed at the picture, then Anne said "Why don't you lie down in my room? It's the only place where you'll get any privacy, and nobody will bother you at all I'll be working."

"Thanks, but I intend to lie down beneath the catapult I'll be closer to my base of operations."

She frowned "That is one of the things I do not like about this men's affair called war If we were not playing at this game, you would be sleeping with me."

"You call this a game? Men and women dying, being tortured?"

"Yes, of course It solves nothing, nothing at all Nor does it permanently hurt anyone. The most it does is to interrupt one's career in one place and make him start all over again in another. As for the torture, that only lasts so long, then it, too, ceases, and you go on"

"You wouldn't be so blasé about that if you were being suspended above a fire."

"I am well aware of that I would scream as loudly as anyone and wish to God that I would die Nevertheless, that doesn't change the essence of what I have said War, in any form, is a game Perhaps one of the sides does not want to play, but it must. And no matter how reluctantly it enters the game, it soon becomes as enthusiastic as the side which initiated it Especially if it is the winning side"

"And what about the battle between the sexes?"

Her black eyes lit up; her red mouth curved into a smile. "Ah, Dick, that is a game where one may get hurt, but one finds the joys are worth the pains."

"You have always found it so?"

"Often enough In that battle, I'm an Achilles—or, I should say, a Penthesilia."

"Arms and the woman, heh?"

There was no one on the stairs at the moment, so he allowed himself the luxury of stroking her shoulder and of continuing the describing of the curve across her magnificent breast.

"Well, Anne, we shall see what comes of this minor war after the major one is over."

She shivered at his touch and said· "To me, and to any discerning person, what you call the minor war is really the major one."

Suddenly, he was reminded of Phyllis, and he felt a twinge of shame, as if he were being unfaithful to her

"You may be right," he said, and he bade her good night and continued on down into the bowels of the Castle

A half hour later, he walked back up to the roof, wrapped himself in his kimono, and lay down beneath the carriage of the catapult.

20.

He woke up at dawn. Hickok was tugging at his sleeve and saying, "Something's up, Dick."

Black rolled out from under the platform, rubbed his raw eyes, and drank the cup of water someone offered him. Then he went to the western parapet and looked out over the Trade Mart.

The slanting sun struck the trees here and there and threw their shadows to the west. They were unmoving, but they were crossed by slowly drifting shades, dark ghosts of the men who had come to watch the phantom pageant of a scene from the pale past of a dim and far-off Earth.

For a second, he did not understand what was going on. Then, as the sun's rays burned the sleepiness from his eyes, the pattern shifted into a recognizable configuration. Chaos became order.

The twelve foot high archiepiscopal cross was the center of the scene. Men were grouped about it, busy at something. Then a gap opened in the crowd, and Black could see.

The Councillors' table had been shoved against the base of the double-armed cross, and on top of that were placed several small tables, across which boards had been laid to make a platform. Some men now mounted to the top of this. They carried with them a man whose arms they firmly held and whom they urged before them. The man turned his head for a moment, and Black saw that it was Borbuch. His face was paler than usual, it was an almost bloodless blank with dark gashes for eyes and mouth. Yet his head was thrown back defiantly.

Murel stood to one side, below the group, directing the procedure, his yellow hair flashing in the sun. His men turned the Russian so that he faced the Castle, with his back to the cross. They they ripped off all his clothes and straightened out his arms. One man stooped and took a hammer and several large spikes from someone on the ground they had obviously been stolen from the carpenter's shop on the docks.

A voice came from behind Black.

"*Ah, mon Dieu!* They are going to crucify him!"

He turned. Anne de Celnos had just come up on the roof. Behind her stood the men she had requisitioned to carry up the great bag containing the accumulated refuse of the Castle. It bulged at their feet, and was almost transparent, even though it was made of three thicknesses of skin. Black estimated that it weighed at least a hundred and fifty pounds.

"Ask Charbrass how he wants it placed," Black ordered. He turned back to watch the scene.

The sun flashed upon the rising and falling hammer held in the hand of the man standing before Borbich. Sun gleamed also on the long, wavy, yellow hair of the hammer wielder.

"That's Tom Custer." It was Hickok's voice, and it was harsh with hate.

The strokes of the hammer rang across the otherwise silent Mart. Black heard the shuffle of feet behind him and heavy breathing and several gasps. He looked behind him at the gathering crowd. "Kelly, get these people back to their stations!" he ordered loudly. "We'll be in action in a short time, and I don't want this roof crowded."

Reluctantly, the onlookers shuffled back down the stairwell.

The spike was driven into Borbich's right hand. He did not cry out, but he jerked with every blow of the hammer, and his face was a twisted, frozen mask. Blood flowed thinly from his palm.

Custer drove a spike into the other hand, and as two men held Borbich's legs, he began nailing the bare feet to the wood. It was then that the tortured man began to scream. He jerked at the spikes which held his hands, and his body curved outwards as if he could push himself away. His ribcage strained against the skin as if it, too, would burst out and run away from the flesh that enclosed it, leaving the empty hide hanging there to take the humiliation and pain as best it could.

Abruptly the screams stopped, and a low sobbing could be heard across the Mart. No one spoke, the men gathered

at the foot of the cross were silent, their necks bent back to stare upwards. There was something about the scene that transfixed them with voicelessness, a static quality, as if they were all figures painted by the sun, and a single word would destroy the breathlessness.

Then, abruptly, Custer tossed his hammer to the ground and jumped down from the platform. As if that had been the signal, the scene broke into action and noise. Everybody moved at once, fluidity replacing stiffness, and the tables were torn down to leave a clear space at the foot of the cross.

No sooner was that done than the monstrous and hairy form of Joe Caveman, the Titanthrop, appeared on the Mart. He limped across the grass, his left foot and shoulder swathed in skin bandages. He stopped at the beam with its double arms, on the upper one of which Borbich was pegged. He peered upwards, but he did not have to bend backwards, for he stood only two feet shorter than the cross itself. His grotesquely long nose tilted like a lance, pointing at the man, he moved closer and sniffed at the sweat of fear and the blood of suffering.

Murel barked a savage laugh that came clearly across the green silence of the Trade Mart. He took the giant by one hand and pulled him away to one side so that those in the Castle would not have their view blocked. Then he took his spear in his right hand and stabbed Borbich in the left side.

Borbich straightened out again, as if he thought he would be killed then, but he did not cry out. Nor was the wound severe, for when Murel withdrew the point, only a thread of blood wormed down from his ribs. Custer then held an open grail to Borbich's side to catch the flow. He had little success, for the small flow ran around the edge and refused to go inside.

Angry, Custer threw the grail to one side.

The Titanthrop put one finger to the wound and tasted the blood. After which, he turned around slowly and gazed puzzledly at Murel.

Anne wept.

Black laughed.

She looked dumbly at him through the tears, her eyes speaking her question for her.

"I am not a brute who enjoys this spectacle," he answered. "But it's ridiculous to shed tears over that. Look at the man! Look at his face, his postures. You can see he's playing a part. He is enjoying his suffering and his imitation of tragedy.

"And an imitation is just what that is: it's not the real thing. There is no tragedy there. Tragedy implies finality, an end and a defeat to a great man or a great thing. Borbich will not go down into the dust, never to rise again. He will wake up on some distant bank, free of his pain and his crippling.

"Not only that, but I'll wager he wasn't captured! I'll wager that he gave himself up, surmising that if he did he'd meet some such fate as this. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if he told them he had built that double cross and hinted to them the kind of treatment he'd like. He probably taunted them into doing that. And why not? If I understand correctly what Phyllis has told me of his Earthly life, he devoted himself to an extensive career of crucifying himself."

"Ah, Dick, you are very cynical," said Anne. "He is a man who can be hurt, and he is suffering very real pain, even if he did ask for it. Is there not enough in that to justify weeping for him?"

"You aren't helping him a bit. Tears never cured anything."

And then he said, "Murel is as much to be pitied as the man he's nailed to the cross. Look at the poor fool! Does he think he's horrifying us with his blasphemies? Or does he think he's daring a lightning bolt from Heaven?"

Murel had tied a bunch of dried grass to his lancehead and dipped it into a pool on the ground, where one of his men had poured water. He then thrust the sopping mess into Borbich's face as if he were offering him a drink. The evangenst jerked his head away, but Murel insisted on wiping it across his face. The sharp edge of the lancehead gashed Borbich's mouth so that the blood ran down his chin.

Charbrass walked up to Black and said softly "What about Borbich, Dick? Couldn't we put him out of his misery? If an arrow wouldn't be accurate at this range, we could try our catapult. A scatter pattern of rocks might kill him, and it would discourage those psychotics from doing anything else to him."

Black looked curiously at Charbrass, for he thought the man's choice of the word "psychotic" was rather peculiar Almost anyone he knew would have called them beasts or savages or words even worse, but they would not have felt detached enough to use such a scientific term But in the next moment, he forgot what he was going to say, for two men had appeared from a hut upon a hillside, and between them they gripped Phyllis.

They hurried her down the hill, and, when she stumbled several times, they picked her up roughly and once struck her across the face. She kicked back and was hit again, this time in the ribs. After that, she bent over, holding her side

Her hair had fallen in disarray over her face, and she was naked to the waist, though she held one arm over her breasts When she was thrown down on her knees before the cross, she looked bravely at Murel, who stood sprad dlelegged before her. He said something to her, and she spat at him He threw his head back in a laugh, and then, putting his foot against her shoulder, tumbled her over backwards.

She lay there, suddenly struck with a paralysis, but still holding her hands over her breasts to shield them from the gaze of the men around her Her eyes, however, seemed to be fixed on the man hanging from the cross He, in turn, was looking straight down at her, evidently saying something Black could not tell from that distance what it was, of course, but the entire stance of Borbich's body, the motions of his head, the very lines into which his face fell, indicated that he was encouraging her

Anne, standing behind Black, whispered "What will they do to her?"

He groaned and could not answer The reply to her question came even as the words left her mouth Her slacks

were being pulled off, and her arms were pinned to the ground by two huskies The line was forming behind Murel, who, being king, would be first in everything

Anne shrieked with horror, but she kept her large eyes open upon the scene and pressed her sharp nails into Black's arm He glanced once at her slightly parted mouth with the tip of her tongue sticking out, a drop of saliva on the end, and he turned away The sickness at his stomach wasn't all caused by what was taking place beneath the cross in the Mart.

"Get ready to shoot," he told Charbrass

Charbrass, his face pale beneath its bronze, picked up the bag and placed it on the catapult's carriage

"Very well, Jairus," said Black "You shoot as close to the foot of the cross as you can Even if you hit Phyllis, I doubt if the bag'll kill her, though it might But that's a chance we'll have to take Better that than what she's going through now."

He risked a glance between the crenellations and saw that Murel had risen and Custer, his lieutenant, was taking his place.

"Kelly, have the western gate ready to open within five minutes Form your men so we can make a charge Everybody capable of bearing arms will be in on it except for the armers and the cat crew A smaller force will make a diversion sally from the eastern gate Is that clear? Good Charbrass, as soon as you have loosed that bag, I want you and your men to come down and help us The cat can't be used during a melee you'd be crushing as many of us as you would Murel's men However, I want your crew to stay close to the Castle's walls If we rescue Phyllis or if we're beaten back, you'll be needed again at the cat and damned quick."

Charbrass patted the hard black piston flanks of his catapult and said, "Ah, little engine, you are an apt symbol of man Carefully designed, wrought with great skill and tenderness, product of a thousand minds and hands Powerful essence of man's mastery of the inanimate And what is your end-use? What gift do you lightly toss upwards to the

heavens and down to man as a sign and symbol of your power and benevolence? What? A bag of excrement, that's what!"

Black was astonished at the somewhat heated speech He looked at Charbrass, but the man returned his gaze gravely and offered no further comment And as he was too busy to indulge in conversation, Black filed away Charbrass' words for a future talk and turned his attention to present business.

"Barker," he said to the drummer, "you stick to your post. And send a message to Tsechan. Tell him to attack immediately, that we need help desperately We'll be charging at once; we can't coincide our attacks, but it shouldn't take him much more than twenty minutes to get here The *Vengeance* is still stranded on the sunken *Dragon's Tooth;* it'll not be able to get in the fight And tell him that if we've been forced to retire to the Castle by the time he gets here, we'll make another charge."

He turned away and muttered to himself, "Provided there's any of us left by then."

His face was a swarthy mask of ferocity, one to inspire his men and discourage his enemies, but inwardly he knew that his five hundred against the two thousand outside the walls foretold another Charge of the Light Brigade Also, he knew that strategy demanded that he wait until the Cayuga's canoes were close to the shores before he attacked But he could not endure any longer the thought of what Phyllis was suffering.

He slipped on a shirt of chainmail and donned the coal scuttle helmet with its noseguard, then gripped the saber that Kelly handed him In his other fist he clutched the iron stick that was his trademark and would now serve as an auxiliary to his blade

Drums beat; Barker pounded out the message Immediately, a throom-throom replied from across the lake Tsechan had been holding his warriors in check, he would advance within the minute.

Black forced himself to take another look He had to push Anne, none too gently, to one side so he could see through

the crenellation "Put on your armor, and damned quick," he said "You'll be right behind me"

She seemed to be rising out of a deep sleep· her great black eyes cleared themselves of the vision in the Mart with difficulty But when she saw the expression on his face, she passed her hand over her brow and said, "I couldn't help it, Dick I've never seen anything like it"

"You enjoy it too much," he growled

He turned his back to her Outside, the Mart was flooded with the hot sun, swords and spearpoints flashed hard, mixed with the softer gleam of bare skin Borbich still hung from the crossbars, his head uplifted and his mouth moving as if in prayer Phyllis also was extended, though horizontally, as much in the attitude of the crucified as he Custer had risen from her and was making some sort of gestures to the Titanthrop The apeman was standing to one side of the cross, stooped so that he would not bump into its lower arm His head was thrust forward as if he were not quite sure of what Custer wanted him to do or else was reluctant to obey.

Black gave a hoarse cry and whirled and ran down the stairwell When he hurtled out upon the lowest floor, he shouted, "Raise the 'cullis!"

The winches groaned; the massive iron prongs rose, the gate was swung violently open, screaming, the Thelemites dashed out, at their head, a maniac who swung a saber in one hand and an iron cane in the other

Simultaneously, something rose in a smooth arc from the Castle's rooftop, something which soared over the heads of the mob in the Mart and rushed down upon the figures paralyzed at the foot of the crucifixion It struck between the woman held upon the ground and the base of the double-beamed cross and it rose again in a geyser of dirty yellow-brown that sprayed everybody for yards around

That was all Black glimpsed before the Murelians ahead of him turned around, suddenly aware that he was charging Then they closed the gap, and he did not see Phyllis or Murel again until he had fought his way to the cross

The Thelemites formed a solid wedge, and they had the

advantage of speed, weight, surprise, and fury on their side. Not only that, but a good half of the invaders were spread out over the hills, still trying to root out those who had escaped them the night before. Another part was engaged in assaulting the blockhouse that guarded the pass to The Mine, and a number of others were trying to work the *Vengeance* off of the sunken *Dragon's Tooth*. Furthermore, Charbrass, contrary to Black's orders, had no sooner released the bag of excrement than he swiftly loaded the carriage with a hundred boulders the size of human heads. It only took him two minutes to do this, and while Black's flying V was halfway to its goal, he swiveled the catapult and fired it at a group on the outside of the melee. The slaughter was terrific: at least fifty men dropped. Encouraged, he did the same to the right and mowed down a like number. It was this sudden consternation and drop of pressure on his enemies' part that allowed the charging men to penetrate so far and so fast. Black did not understand at the time what was happening but he took advantage of it and slashed straight ahead, cutting down all who got in his way. He was a blade rather than a man, and he could not be stopped. Behind him his men fought like demons led by Satan himself; there were many women among them, and they battled as fiercely as the men, for they were aroused by what had happened to Phyllis and by the fear of what would happen to them if they were taken alive.

Black did not remember how long it took him to reach the ring of spearmen around Murel; all he knew was that he seemed to have been cutting off arms and heads and beating down blades and lancepoints for hours when, all of a sudden, there was an open space before him, beyond which was a fence of spears. He did not pause but leaped forward, knocked down a spear, thrust at the face behind it, saw it fall, covered with blood, felt a vague blow in his side, **and then he was facing Murel.**

At least he supposed it was Murel, for the man was covered from head to foot in filth. Phyllis at his feet was similarly daubed, as was Borbich hanging from the cross. And a little way off, Custer and the Titanthrop Joe Caveman, were also soiled.

Mared had a saber in his hand and when he saw Black he stepped over the body of the woman, his blade lifted. At the same moment Phyl-s raised on one elbow. Her other hand seized a spear which somebody had dropped and with one swift and sure movement she drove the steel head into the man's groin. Then she fell back as if that act of hate had exhausted all the little strength left in her outraged flesh.

Mared dropped his saber and clutched at his fountaining wound. Black stepped forward and drove the edge of his blade halfway through the man's neck, bowed and presented to him like a sheep's or a slaughterhouse.

A spear from nowhere slanted off his leg and thudded into Phyl-s neck. It was followed by the charging body of Coster, roaring, his brownstained yellow hair flying behind him.

He would have been easy prey for Black, but Hakok stepped before him and with a flick of his hand threw a knife that buried itself in the neck of his ancient Earthtime foe. The next instant, both Hakok and Black were defending themselves against the Titanthrop who rushed at them swinging his huge stone axe.

Jon Caveman had attacked the right wing of the Thexemites and bashed in so many skulls that he had almost succeeded in breaking up the attack by himself. Nevertheless he was bleeding from many deep gashes and his left arm hung useless, paralyzed by the arrow which had pierced his shoulder the night before. He carried a big shield but he could not lift the edge, as he had once done, to catch men's chins and break their jawbones.

Black saw the colossus towering over them, a man walking like a bear, the face bestial with its slanting brow and deep-sunken eyes ringed with bone, the once frightening prognathous nose severed, its end hanging by a thread of skin, two tigerish canines exposed in a gaping mouth that looked as if it could bite off a man's head, the thousand pounds of pre-Adamite flesh shaking the earth with every step . . . the axe rising . . . falling . . . falling. . .

II

THE BIG GRAIL

1.

The locomotive, an 1850 model, puffed out clouds of atomic energy as it idled by the railroad station.

—All aboard! called the conductor, Jairus Charbrass.

Richard Black swung aboard and scrambled with the other passengers for a seat. Just as he found one, another man jumped into it.

Black seized him and started to throw him out the window.

—Dick! Ruffian Dick, you can't do this to me! Don't you recognize your old friend?

—Speke not to me of friendship! Black replied, and tossed him out, noticing as he did so that his friend's chest was still mangled by the gunshot wound.

He sat down. Speke came back down the aisle and stood by Black, who ignored him.

King Gélélé entered with two of his own skulls under his arms. One skull was his when he had been an old man, the other, his skull as an infant.

—Wheah you gwine? he asked.

—Headwatahs. Wheah you gwine? replied Black

—Dahomey. Hee, hee! he cackled, poking Black in the ribs. Y'all get it? To homey! Hee, hee!

Golden-haired and blue-eyed, Isabel entered.

Oh, my darling Dick, my only Dick, my god! my hero! my brave one, my dark Apollo, my bright Apollyon, demon lover, matchless Uebermann, robust robber. .

—Ahh, shut up, snarled Phyllis, smiling sweetly at Black as she walked by him. She stepped heavily on his toe and said. Oh, excuse me!

—Tickets, please! bawled Charbrass. But nobody paid any attention.

—Where's this train going? spoke Speke.

—To a little river town by the big O-high-O, replied Phyllis breathlessly. We'll be so happy!

—Not I, said Black. He stuck his head out the window and looked down.

—This must be the right train, though; it rides on a big rail.

—Rides on a big grail, repeated Charbrass

Oh, protested Phyllis, but you must get off with me now Think of all I've done for you I've given you a twentieth century education I've enabled you to get rid of your ignorant superstitions and prejudices, and to learn, somewhat, to control your terrible temper. You are a better man because of me

Isabel sat in his lap.

—Don't listen to her, Dickie bird, great shining hawk-god Horus. I think you're divine just as you were Give her the old heave-ho and take me back. After all, I'm your Original Sin!

—She means wife, giggled Phyllis.

—All off! bellowed the conductor. O-high-O!

—Not I, said Black. I'm going on past the end of the line I want a long drink of time.

—This is the end of the line, argued Charbrass

-Get off with me, pleaded the two women

No, I've been on with you two too long So long.

Phyllis opened a door on the right side of the coach.

—Here's my town. Let's go.

It was a rich and beautiful village, with many cherry and banana trees.

Isabel opened a door on the left side.

—Come with me and be my love from burning Araby.

Outside was the Sahara.

Black arose and walked toward the front of the coach

—Quo vadis?

—I'm tossing out the engineer and driving this train myself, he said.

—Well, called Anne, I'll try to get along without you. What about a little loving, monsieur *Charbrass?*

—Madame, I only punch the tickets.

—Goodbye, called the three women.

—Not goodbye, he answered. You know I never say that. Just so long. I'll see you all at the headwaters when my ship comes in.

He entered the locomotive cab. The fireman was a fellow named Clemens. The engineer was a fellow named Richard Black.

—Come to throw me out? asked the latter cheerfully.

—Well, remarked Sam, Black is Black and never the twain shall meet. Mark my word.

—What are you doing on the Suicide Express? asked the engineer.

—Suicide Express?

—Righto. What else do you think? If you want to go any great distance in this world, you don't build a boat, or start walking. You cut your throat and pop up thousands of miles away. Cheap, easy, and fast travel. Besides, there's a moral in the title of this interminable train. A tail is no good without a moral, you know. And this one has one. Or does it? After all, it ends up where it started.

—You're thinking of the big O-high-O, said Sam.

—P'raps. Anyway, this is also called the Suicide Express because you have to lose your life in order to gain it.

—This is where I came in, groaned the fireman, and he leaped out the window.

—Yes, I've heard that before, said Black. What does it mean?

The engineer reached into the pocket of his overalls as if he were going to pull out a watch. Instead, he held up Black's bleeding heart.

—Ah, now I remember, said Black. You're the fellow I met in that other dream. Tell me true: when will you give me my heart back?

—You never had one, said the engineer, throwing the spongy mass out the window.

—What'll I do now? wailed Black.

—Grow another one, a better one, said the engineer. And get off at the end of the line with everybody else.

2.

Richard Black awoke. He sat up and looked around. For a moment, he thought the landscape had been jerked away from under him, as a tablecloth is yanked from under a tumbler of water without a drop being spilled. He was unchanged, but the scenery was not.

It took him a moment to realize that he must have died and had come alive again somewhere else along the River. He had been translated and was now sitting upon the river's bank in the early and chill light of the swift dawn, naked, a pile of clothing on his left hand and a grail on his right.

He lifted his hand to his head and felt the top of his skull. It was smooth and unbroken, but he could still feel the Titanthrop's great stone axehead swinging down upon it, and the shattering light and the darkness that had followed. Memory of pain and of death caused him to wince at the contact of his fingers with his scalp.

Yet, he was whole and alive again. Even the scars he had received from twenty years in the Valley had vanished.

Assured that he was all right, he looked around. This section of the River did not differ greatly from the one he had

left, except that it was not by a lakeside, and all the buildings and people of Theleme were gone.

No, not all of them! Ten yards away, Phyllis was just sitting up and staring wild-eyed about her, and a little beyond was the unconscious behemoth bulk of Joe Caveman. Close to him was the yellow head of Murel. And between the River and Black was the bronzed and naked figure of Charbrass, already on his feet and staring intently toward the hills.

Black followed his gaze. There, about fifty yards away, a group of about thirty dwarfish men and women were approaching. Though no larger than an African pygmy, they were a dirtyish white color, and had enormous heads. Their little eyes had a slight epicanthic fold, giving them a Mongolian tinge. Long, coarse brown hair hung down to their waists.

In their small hands they held bamboo poles tipped with stone points; a few carried flint axes Their leader, the tallest of the group, was shouting something at them. Though he spoke gibberish, his gestures were meaningful, he was demanding an immediate attack.

Black rose to his feet; Charbrass at once moved up beside him. The engineer had the handle of his grail firmly gripped in his right hand.

"I may be wrong," he said, "but I think these pygmies lived in Central Europe around ten thousand B. C.—they were cannibals. I don't know whether living on the River has changed their nasty habits, but I doubt it."

Any uncertainty was in the next moment removed. At a single shout from their leader, the entire group swung into a fast trot towards them. And at the same time, the Titanthrop lifted his head and blinked at the pygmies from the broad rings of bone that surrounded his eyes. The next moment, a stone axe hissed by, narrowly missing his skull.

He bellowed and leaped to his feet. The pygmies came to a halt, their eyes wide as they were confronted by this dawn man who was fully three times as tall as they

Murel also rose. Phyllis, however, still sat. She was pale, and her face had a look of shock.

Charbrass, seeing her, murmured to Black: "Her body is reacting again to the memory of the rape and the battle after that. Too bad we had to land among these savages, she needs immediate therapy. However . . ."

Charbrass walked up to the goliath form of Joe caveman and ranged himself alongside him. Black picked up his grail, the only weapon at hand, and followed him. Murel placed himself on Black's right The Englishman noticed that the American's right eye had been replaced, just as his own shattered skull had grown together, and Joe Caveman's severed nose was once more whole.

Unknown benefactors, we owe again for the flesh. But, oh, how shall we pay you back? And what if gratitude, long frustrated, turn to rage?

Murel spoke out of the corner of his mouth without taking his eyes from the pygmies. "Black, let's call it a truce until we get through this mess here—what d'you say?"

"Right you are," replied Black tightly. "Watch it! Here they come!"

The slanteyed pygmies, their number increased by another group of about thirty, had recovered from the sight of the giant unfolding his height before them, and, screeching and waving their weapons, they broke into a fast run.

The fight was furious and noisy, but within two minutes it was over The remnants of the little savages fled in all directions, leaving behind them about a quarter of their number Most of these lay scattered around the Titanthrop, their skulls and bones broken by the flailing of his huge grail He himself bled from about a dozen wounds, all of them slight His fellow-defenders were gouged or bruised in a few places, but they had suffered nothing incapacitating, and they had given a good account of themselves.

Moreover, they now had some spears and axes They hastily put on their clothing. Then Black and Charbrass, supporting Phyllis between them, urged her to walk Murel and the Titanthrop fell in behind them as a rearguard

Phyllis mumbled, "Where are we going?"

"Up the River, of course," said Black He had not thought about which direction to take, it had seemed natu-

ral they would walk against the current, towards the headwaters.

"Dick," she said, jerking her head around for a swift and almost furtive glance over her shoulder, "that man That's Murel, Dick, he . . ."

"Yes," he replied gently, "I know, Phyl. Don't think about it."

"But what's he doing here?"

Charbrass said, "He was translated with us, Phyl And he's helping us against these pygmies."

"But aren't you 'fraid he'll kill us?"

"Not just now."

She clutched Black's arm frantically.

"Dick, Dick, you saw it. Oh, God, I couldn't help it. I pleaded with him but he did it anyway."

Charbrass looked at Black and said, "I'm going to use some first-aid on her. Don't interrupt unless it's absolutely necessary."

They walked on, holding their grails and stolen spears in one hand, and Phyllis with the other She automatically clutched her own cylinder Behind her the two other males fanned out, wary, looking behind them for more attackers. Nor were more bigheaded savages long in showing up. But these made way for the tall strangers and closed again behind them, like grass before the tread of an elephant And, though a thousand had soon collected, they offered no more attack. Joe Caveman was a tower against which they did not care to advance.

Charbrass, meanwhile, as if the pygmies did not exist, continued to talk in a very low voice to Phyllis. Black not only could not help overhearing, he made a determined effort to absorb what he was saying He himself, during his Victorian existence upon Earth, had shown an interest in Mesmerism and other psychological methods that was far in advance of his time. Furthermore, he had done some experimenting and, during his stay at Theleme, he had learned twentieth-century techniques from Phyllis and Doc Winters But the engineer's method of approach was different from any he had ever seen. He did not understand all of it by

any means, but he could catch the shadow of a pattern from observing questions and Phyllis' responses.

At first he thought that the man was merely running a word-association test, for he kept feeding to her certain nouns, verbs, and adjectives, each of which was the first in a long festoon whose only common element was that each was suggested by the one preceding it. After about ten minutes of this, during which Phyllis grew more tired and paler but still continued stumbling on, Charbrass suddenly tied up all the phrase-strings around one particular word which had occurred in every one of the verbal rosaries.

Then he asked her to turn that word over in her mind, to plumb into all the associations it had for her, and also to break down that word and re-combine it into anything which made sense. To do so, she was also to change the pronunciation of the vowels if she cared to, and to give them other values than they would naturally have.

"*Erap,*" she said. "That means nothing."

"Go on," said Charbrass.

"*Pear.*"

"What does that suggest?"

"The vulva of the female child is pearshaped."

"Go on."

"*Père.* French for father."

"Yes?"

"*Peer.* It means unequalled. But when I was a child, it meant unequalled or unexcelled because it suggested the House of Lords. Lord and master. God. Father."

"Try another combination."

"*Prae.* Could be pronounced as pray. Or prey, p-r-e-y. Give it the Latin value, and it's pry."

She giggled, half-hysterically.

"*Pry* the *prayerful pere* from the *pear*."

"Yes. What else?"

"*Pare.*"

"And?"

"*Pair.*"

"So?"

"*Pare* the *pair* apart. Man and woman shall cleave unto each other until death do us *pare*. And afterwards, too."

"Go on."

"Cleave unto one another. But a cleaver splits apart by force. Force, farce. What's . . ."

"Stick to combinations of r-a-p-e."

"*Reap.*"

"O.K."

"What ye sow, ye shall *reap*. Or *rape*."

"Is that what you have sowed?"

"That's what happened to me, wasn't it?"

"Was it?"

"Yes!" she cried, a flush suddenly replacing the whiteness in her cheeks. "That was it! I asked for it. I wanted to be punished! And I was beneath the cross, too, the double-cross, a double pun! The whole thing's a tremendous subconscious pun and a deep inner demand that I be punished. And I wasn't raped by my father, even though my words seem to indicate that, nor did I have incestuous desires. But there's another Father, and I've been denying Him, and Borbich showed me that just before he died, and . . ."

Charbrass ignored her outburst. Black got the impression from the fleeting play of muscles across his face that Phyllis had gone completely off the track and had been trying to interpret her responses in terms of the psychology of her own times.

"Phyllis," he said, "I'd like you to take those four letters, try to hold all their possible combinations and the various meanings simultaneously in your body—by which I mean all the cells of your brain and body. You will also keep in mind the concept of your experiences with the words you have been thinking about. Not the experiences themselves, but the concept of them. Try to pack their essences into one image, one symbol.

"And as you do this, put out imaginary feelers inside yourself. Let your feelers grope around for an imaginary tuning-fork. This fork is one that will vibrate in tune with the symbol of your words-plus-experiences. When your supposed feelers are connected at one end with the symbol and

at the other end with this so-called tuning fork, the fork will begin humming It will recognize this symbol, it will vibrate at the same rate as the symbol. And the symbol will vibrate at the rate as the fork. Got the idea?"

She nodded, her blue-grey eyes brightening with a simultaneous interest in the concept and with the withdrawal of shock.

"What're you trying to do?" she asked "Set up a symbol that'll match the resonance of a neuron-gestalt? And through the destruction of that symbol also destroy the undesirable nervous pattern?"

"Yes," he said. "How did you know?"

"Oh, I've been talking to Doc Winters," she replied "He told me that you had dropped him a few hints about therapy. But he had the impression that you had only a layman's knowledge in the psychology of your time."

"I don't have a doctor's degree in psychodynamics, true. But every person of my time had to learn the basic laws of the human psyche Well, never mind that Let's get on to our tuning fork, shall we?"

They walked on, the man asking questions, the woman replying as best she could, which, in this case, was very good indeed. And it took an amazingly short time for Phyllis to be worked through the trauma of the incident in the Trade Mart.

As Charbrass later explained, Phyllis was a comparatively stable person, free of psychoses and suffering from no more neuroses than were common to the people of her day. Her experience beneath the cross had been injurious enough, but there had been no deep underlying trauma to re-enforce the shock Given a chance, her tough and resilient spirit would bounce back, and the flesh would follow Moreover, it could safely be presumed that any real damage had been repaired during the interim between her death and her resurrection. "That has always been the case," he said "Injuries to the cells are repaired, and psychoses seem to be temporarily alleviated I suppose that if we knew enough, we'd see that mental illnesses are linked with the growth of certain un-

desirable neural paths Or with the destruction of desirable ones.

"If, as we've postulated, our bodies are somehow "photographed" by mechanical means, then we can assume that these machines are set to detect malignancies in our cells and to remove them before translation

"However, we know that they don't remove the basic cause for mental aberrations or psychosomatic diseases. And that suggests that many of those originate in the will of the patient. That is, for some reason which his subconscious thinks valid, he *wants* to become ill

"And if that is true then no machine can reach into him and change his will.

"But we do know that translation from one place in the Valley to another often results in the old psychosis not developing. This could mean that a change in the environment will sometimes be a healthy one.

"However," said Charbrass grinning, "I've strayed from the point of my little lecture I meant to say that man is the symbol-manipulating creature. He uses symbols as vehicles for conceptions, and he uses them to ride upwards or downwards. They may be good or bad, but even if they are the latter they can be used to tear themselves down and along with them the neural paths to which they are connected Or perhaps, I should say that the neural paths are themselves the symbols, for it is the whole pattern of interlocking neurons, the gestalt, that projects the ikon or image through which we act and with which we interpret our universe

"Phyllis has suffered a violation of spirit and of flesh—though I shouldn't be using those terms separately, as the flesh is the spirit and vice versa—but her reactions to it have been more physical than psychical. By that I mean that she won't freeze up in the future whenever she has normal sexual intercourse There was no deep underlying frigidity to begin with, no sexual anesthesia which was made even stronger by her terrible experience. She'll bounce back—except for one thing.

"That thing is a certain guilt that she has been carrying

these last few years, a guilt of which she could easily unburden herself, but which she has not been able to do because she has been afraid And that guilt and fear is directed toward you, Black."

"You know then?" said Phyllis, gasping as if she had been splashed with cold water.

Charbrass shook his bronzed head

"Yes. I'm rather shut-mouthed, but I've seen many things during my twelve years in Theleme, and I know most of you people far better than you think. Moreover, Phyllis, there are more people who know about you and your burden of guilt than you suppose. There always are."

"What the bloody hell is going on?" Black demanded.

"That is up to Phyllis to tell you," said Charbrass, calmly "Perhaps I should not have even brought the subject up. But I knew that Phyllis, deep down, wants to do so, and that, brave as she is, she hasn't yet worked up her courage. So I thought that I would force her to do so She is probably hating me just now for this, but she will know later that I have done the right thing Isn't that so, Phyl?"

Her face was twisted with some undecipherable emotion She cried, "Oh, I don't know! I do hate you, and yet I'm glad that you've made me do this!"

"Do what?" said Black, harshly.

At the same time he glanced around at the childlike figures that stood before them as far as he could see, the little men and women that parted before them, yet held their spears and axes threateningly. The sun was higher now and beginning to get hot And across the half-mile width of the River he could see, on the other bank, tall people with white skins and hair that flashed red in the bright light They were watching the newcomers, shaking their own spears as they gestured at them and, occasionally, shouting loudly enough to carry over the waters

"I think," said Black, "that we should cross The River. They may not be friendlier, but it's worth taking a chance."

3.

They commandeered a dugout in which they put Phyllis

and their twenty grails. She paddled; the men swam. They had gone no more than twenty yards out when the pygmies swarmed after them. However, it was only to the edge of the bank, where they contented themselves by throwing clubs and spears. Some of their missiles splashed close, but none struck their targets.

The tall people on the other side spoke a tongue that had no family resemblance to any that Black knew, and he could speak at least fifty and was well acquainted with a hundred more. He was the only one disappointed; the rest were happy that they were hospitably received. Nor did they resent the ceremony of meeting the prominent people of the area, all of whom were introduced with a lengthy but unintelligible speech.

That evening, as the newcomers sat around a large fire with some of the local dignitaries, Murel spoke to the Thelemites.

"Look, I know you must hate me for what I did, and you are probably wondering what Joe and I are going to do when we call off this truce. Well, don't worry. We are not going to do a damned thing that will offend you. And if you can forget what happened, please do. Remember that the conditions of yesterday have changed today. That time and place have faded away; this time and place require a different attitude on our part."

Black and Phyllis were astounded. He wondered if it were a trick. All day he'd been planning how to kill the Titanthrop and Murel when he got a chance.

"What has caused this overnight conversion?" asked Black, sarcastically. "Did you see the light? Or were you talking to Borbich?"

Murel winced and replied softly, "I deserve that, and I regret particularly what I did to him. But let me answer your first question. In the first place, I'm not sure I could call it a conversion. I'd term it a backsliding, but a reverse backsliding, one in the right direction. I don't mean by that that I'm the same old hellfire-preaching, Godfearing, mealy-mouthed hardhearted hypocrite that I was back on Earth. What I do mean is that something happened to me. It's not

something that has miraculously changed me from an utter brute to a pious saint. Far from it. I can fight as well as I did before; if you try anything, I'll defend myself I'm not a eunuch It's true that Phyllis castrated me—I had it coming, I'll admit—but I'm whole again, and I am, I suppose, fundamentally capable of repeating . the same bestial actions."

"What did happen?"

"I had a dream, just before I woke up on these banks "

"The translation dream," remarked Charbrass.

"Yes," said Murel. "It's nothing uncommon In fact, I think it's almost universal. Every translatee I've talked to has had it. It's a different dream for every person, and every person doesn't always repeat his dream But I have Once, when I first woke up along the River. A second time when the Samoans killed me A third when Phyllis killed me."

"But I didn't!" she protested. "Dick cut your head off I saw it just before I passed out—or away, I mean "

He shrugged. "So? I was too wrapped up in what you had done to me to see him. It makes no difference

"Anyway, this dream is always the same And I've had it three other times, right after some especially emotional episode in my life in the Valley A hooded figure warns me that I'd better become true to myself and abandon my ways, otherwise. . .

"The punishment is left unuttered, but the figure reaches into my flesh and pulls out my genitals And I plead with it to give them back, and it replies that it will when I repay the debt I owe for the flesh And when I ask how I may pay, it says that I'll have to find that out for myself Just before the dream ends, the face beneath the hood becomes visible, and I see that it is my own.

"However, in this last dream, the features were a curious mixture of mine and Borbich's."

He hesitated and then added "And of Phyllis's, too "

Charbrass had been eating He stabbed a fork in Murel's direction "Let's be honest. You're frigid, aren't you?"

Murel had been sitting on the ground with his arms

locked around his knees, his back bent forward. Now he sat up straight, his fists clenched in front of him.

"What makes you say that?"

"It's easy to guess," said Phyllis. "Your symbolism is an obvious signpost pointing towards what's been bothering you."

"I had five children," he protested.

"Come, come, Murel," said Charbrass. "What does that have to do with it?"

"Well, then, what do you think?" Murel's voice was higher than it had been, and his face was red. Black thought it unlikely that he had changed as much as he pretended.

"I think that your frigidity may be at the root of your violent reactions in the Valley. Or that it at least contributes to your troubled condition One thing is certain, and that is that you have been protesting in a very destructive manner against something disturbing."

Murel was silent for a while The firelight flickered over his blond hair and his long ascetic-looking face.

"Perhaps you may be right," he said at last. "I had a mother who practically went into hysterics at the slightest mention of anything that had the slightest connection with sex And my father was always preaching hellfire and damnation against any frivolity or pleasure. Together, my parents succeeded in making me believe that sex was dirty.

"And yet, they were horrified when I didn't want to get married They insisted it was my duty to beget children. So I married a mousy, flat-breasted woman, and I begat my five children. We didn't sleep together often, and when we did, we were in a hurry to get it over with

"All the time, I knew I was missing something. I thought I might find it with some of my full-breasted, vigorous parishioners, but I never had the guts to try, and after every temptation I became more and more cold and self-castigating."

"And so," interrupted Charbrass, "you came to the Valley and found that you were not in a place of eternal flames And the old institutions that once curbed you were broken

So you decided that if sex was dirty, you would wallow in it."

Murel rose "Yes, that was it. But it did no good A hog enjoys his bed of muck; I hated mine. Yet I kept trying and trying, hoping I'd break through that wall of ice which froze me, no matter to what depths I descended.

"And when I took Phyllis beneath that cross—a deed that seemed to me my most daringly blasphemous—I felt the worst. And I didn't—I *couldn't* enjoy it.

"And then, while I was trying to get Joe Caveman to do the same, and he was refusing, that bag of excrement fell beside me as if it had been hurled by Heaven. It burst and plastered me with filth. And in that moment, I think, I realized thoroughly who and what I was.

"Moreover, when Phyllis thrust her spearblade into my groin, she was doing what I wanted her to do—for I have wished sometimes that I had the courage to remove the cause of my trouble."

"It's you that offends, not your organs," said Charbrass

"I know that. And I hope to do something about it. But I can't unless I have help."

"I may be able to help you. You saw what I did this morning. I have a few techniques for getting a person started on the road to recovery, but most of what is done is up to the ill person himself. He must *want* very much to be healthy."

"We'll see," said Murel. "Come on, Joe Time to go to bed."

The Titanthrop gazed bleakly at the man. "Joe thtaying here," he answered in a thunderous bass voice. "Joe liketh what Charbrath thaid Joe liketh Black, too"

Murel grinned nervously. "Joe thinks I'm the apeman because of what I tried to get him to do to Phyllis. Maybe he's right."

He lurched off into the darkness, his fists clenched

Black said "I still don't think he can be trusted."

"No, he can't," answered Charbrass "But if he is ever to be trusted, we must act now as if we believe in him"

"I'm not loitering here to be his nursemaid," remarked Black. "Tomorrow I'm pushing on up the River."

"You're still determined to get to the Big Grail?"

"Yes, even if I have to walk forty million miles and it takes me six thousand years."

Phyllis put her hand on Black's arm and looked sorrowfully at him. "Oh, Dick, I've been so wrapped up in my own troubles that I didn't think of you. What a shock it must have been to be taken away from the boat just before it's completed. It's horrible! Here we've been working like slaves for twelve years, and then this happens!"

He nodded. "Yes, that's one reason why I find it rather difficult to forgive Murel as easily as you and Charbrass seem to have done."

"Well, the deed is done," drawled the engineer, "and there's nothing we can do about it."

"Oh," exclaimed Phyllis, "I wonder what the *River Comet* will do? I suppose Clemens and the others will take it up the River anyway?"

"That," said Black, "is another story. I don't suppose we'll ever hear it, though, unless we, too, go to the River's source."

"Wouldn't it be marvelous if we arrived there first?"

"It's possible," said Charbrass. "We may have been lucky enough to be translated comparatively close to where we want to go."

"P'raps."

Black rose and looked at Phyllis.

"You're going to bed?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I'll go with you." Then she hesitated. "That is, if you want me to?"

"Why shouldn't I?" he asked in a colorless voice.

"I thought that—perhaps—well, since Murel did—what he did—that . . ."

"She means that you may think her soiled," explained Charbrass.

"Good God!" burst out Black. "How ridiculous can you get, Phyllis?"

Tears filled her eyes. "Don't talk that way to me!"

"Very well. I'm sorry. But let's go; we start at dawn That is, if you're coming with me "

"Of course I am, Dick! How could you think otherwise?"

The Titanthrop's low rumble rose from behind them. "Joe comin' 'long, too. Joe liketh Black. Black'th a brave man. Black killed Joe!"

Black blinked. "I did?"

"Thure! Joe thmathed Black'th thkull in, but Black thtuck hith thaber into Joe'th belly Joe thtaggered around a vile, coughed up lotth of blood, and kicked the bucket."

"Fundamentally, he's a good guy," whispered Phyllis. "He just fell in with the wrong company!"

"Welcome, Joe," said Black. "I'll be glad to have you along."

"Thankth, Black. And I'll thleep near Black tonight tho you won't worry about killerth or anybody."

The party broke up The newcomers said goodnight to their hosts and went to the huts prepared for them The Titanthrop lay down on a pile of grass outside the doorway Phyllis watched him for a moment

"He's really nice," she said, "though he's easily influenced. And he does show some regard for other people's feelings—which indicates he can be civilized Did you notice that he wouldn't say why he refused to rape me? It was because I'm sexually repulsive to him, I'm sure To him, I'm a spindly, flat-faced, anemic, noseless female of an inferior genus—absolutely unattractive But he didn't say anything because he was afraid he'd offend me

"Still—" she grinned weakly, "—I'm glad he did feel that way."

"It's good to see you talking so freely about the incident. I was afraid that it would give you a terrible and long-lasting shock."

"Well, Charbrass' therapy helped me over the memory of it and seemed to make the entire incident less serious than it would normally have seemed And, too, I was partially anesthetized; my body hardly felt a thing And Murel was the only man who did anything."

"*What?*"

"Yes. Poor Tom Custer refused to obey Murel's orders until Murel told him he'd nail him to the other side of the cross if he didn't Custer tried, but he couldn't do it. Fear, I suppose."

She lay down by his side on the grass mattress.

"Borbich helped, too. He was talking to me all the time, you know, even though he himself was in a terrible agony"

"Nothing would stop Borbich from talking," said Black.

"I know you don't like him, but he was a wonderful inspiration to me. And you don't know what his presence did If it hadn't been for his encouragement, I'd have gone completely mad."

"I won't ask you what he said. I'm glad he helped you, but I can imagine his 'words of inspiration'"

"I suppose so. But he helped me enormously, and I admire him. In fact, I think that he proved he was a great man and that he believed absolutely in his principles.

"For instance, he told me it was easy to love a man as he should be or to love mankind as a whole because both are only mental images. But the true test is to love a man as he is. If you can do that, if you can love a man for whom you have no respect, who, in fact, gives you all the reason in the world for despising and loathing him, then you have transcended the human in you Or, perhaps, you have finally discovered the truly human—that one spark which is caught from contact with the divine."

Black groaned and said, "All that is very high-sounding and very meaningless Utter beastly rot. Nonsense."

"But Dick, it isn't He meant it, and he proved it. Believe me, he couldn't have professed such beliefs while he was hanging from spikes through his feet and hands. If he'd been a hyprocrite, he'd have revealed it then"

"All very well And what did he say when the excrement flew?"

Despite her seriousness, she laughed.

"I know. And that, I think, is what convinced me. For after that nauseating geyser from the bursting bag had splashed all of us around the cross, he said, 'This is what

happens to anyone who tries to convince others that he does love them and that they should abandon their selfishness and hypocrisies and love each other. Immediately, he is overwhelmed with all the foulnesses of mankind, who does not want the naked and white truth because he is afraid of it.' But Borbich pointed out that not only were he and I, the victims, deluged Those who were injuring us were also fouled."

"Leave it to Borbich to be pointing out a moral even at a time like that," said Black.

"You're impossible! I'd think you'd be grateful to him for having helped me After all, he was the only one who was there in my time of need."

"Don't forget that immediately afterwards the entire Castle was trying to rescue you And we were attacking prematurely and unwisely because I couldn't endure what was being done to you."

"I'm glad. And I won't say anymore about it. Except that that shows you love me."

She snuggled into his arm and said, softly, "Do you remember what Charbrass said about my having suffered from a guilty conscience for a number of years?"

"Yes."

"Didn't you wonder what he was talking about?"

"No, I supposed it was your three or four infidelities."

She sat up and stared at him.

"What? You've known about those all these years?"

"Yes," he said, indifferently "Some of your so-called friends were rather eager to report your actions. I told them it was none of their business."

She trembled.

"But why didn't you say anything to me?"

"Oh, I presumed, at first, that you'd tell me yourself, according to our agreement. When you didn't, I took it for granted that you either had not been unfaithful or else you were afraid to tell me Not that I cared Three or four adulteries in five years don't make a person promiscuous, you know."

"But-but that makes me mad! Didn't you really care?"

"No. If you remember, Phyl, we Thelemites all swore we'd be completely honest with ourselves and with each other. After a while, we abandoned that and went back to a more civilized method of social intercourse. We found that a certain small hypocrisy in our dealings with each other was necessary to reduce social friction. Otherwise, we had too many hurt feelings and quarrels.

"You couldn't tell a man he was ugly or uncouth or a bore without a violent resentment on his part.

"So, I imagined you'd come to the same conclusion. As you will remember, I have gone on several trips lasting a number of weeks or months. I did not always sleep alone."

"Then—why this open affair with Anne? Why this change in attitude towards me? I thought you were going to give me the pitch and take her as your hutmate?"

"We've gone through all that," he said, wearily. "Forget her. Go to sleep."

She lay down in his arms again.

"My God, all this worrying for nothing. If you knew the hell I've gone through . . ."

"Oh, I surmised it," he said, and he chuckled.

"You bastard! Anyway, I'm glad I've told you and that you still love me."

She kissed him, and he responded without warmth. He was pleased that she was now safe and healed, but he would not have felt very sorry if she had happened to be translated elsewhere along The River.

That "choice egotism of the heart called love" was no longer alive in him. There was but one thing that burned in his chest, one desire that could not be quenched. That was his vision of The River's head-waters and of the white and gleaming Big Grail set in its midst.

4.

They left the next day. Murel asked permission to go with them. Black hesitated for a few seconds and then said, "Very well. But it's understood that I'm the leader. I want no disputes."

Murel nodded his blond head, and they began walking Nor did he, at first, give any trouble. He even made a definite effort to ingratiate himself with Phyllis. She was understandably uneasy with him, but as the days passed her warmth and generosity brought about a complete forgiveness.

"Why aren't you friendlier to him?" she asked Black one night.

"I do joke with him," he replied. "But I'm often reserved with him because I don't trust him What he's done in the past doesn't bother me at all, believe me I've been friends with greater villains than he. But I kept an eye on them. They knew it and consequently tried no treachery."

"Uh, huh, I see. But he knows you distrust him. Now, Borbich said . . ."

Black interrupted her by consigning Borbich to an eternal imprisonment in a bag filled with ordure

Phyllis was silent for a while.

Then, "Dick, do you miss Anne?"

"No, I can truthfully say that I don't "

"She was only a passing infatuation?"

"Rather I passed away immediately after becoming infatuated, if you remember."

"Don't joke. Then, you don't love her?"

"No. I was tremendously attracted to her in a sexual way. And she was to me But it wouldn't have lasted Love 'em and leave 'em was her motto."

"Oh, I'm glad. But think how awful it would have been if she had been translated along with you, and I'd gone some other place."

"Yes, wouldn't it?"

He could not keep the indifference from his voice, and he knew that she perceived it He was past keeping up a pretense If she asked him just exactly how he did feel towards her, she would get an exact answer But if she was afraid to ask, as he was sure she was, then she could hug that pretense to her in an effort to keep it alive and warm.

Swiftly, the days and nights whirled by They passed through many peoples, many races and colors and tongues

One night, they stole a boat that was large enough to hold Joe Caveman's great weight in addition to their own. Paddling furiously all night, they outdistanced any possible pursuit. The next three thousand miles they were very grateful to the former owner for his involuntary gift. Both banks were inhabited with creatures who looked like Piltdown Man; short men and women with human bodies but thick apelike jaws.

The Titanthrop became excited.

"Joe ith getting clothe, clothe. Thothe thingth live clothe to Joe'th people."

"How close?" asked Black.

Joe shrugged his mighty shoulders. "Black knowth I'm no good at ethtimating dithtanth. But ve get there thoon. Maybe twenty dayth. Maybe forty. Who knowth?"

The days sped by. Their hands grew hard from the paddling, their backs, strong and tough. Still the Piltdowners crowded to the banks to stare at them from beneath great eyeridges of bone.

Then one day another type began appearing among them, a very short and hairy creature even more brutal looking than their neighbors.

"Peking Man," remarked Phyllis. "Maybe. It'd take a professional anthropologist to say for sure."

The Titanthrop frowned.

"What're they doing here? Joe doethn't remember them."

Black was puzzled, too, for he had been at a loss to explain how they could be close to The River's source. They still cast no shadows when the sun was directly overhead, which meant that they were on or near the equator. If that were so, then why should they be getting near their destination?

Charbrass was asked for a theory.

"We've had many discussions on that. And we've been able to build up several pictures by piecing together reports of various people up and down the River. We know, for instance, that The Big Drink has an average width of half a mile, and is bounded on each side by a plain a mile wide. Then there are a few large hills from which the mountains

rear rather abruptly. These can't be climbed over because they are too high.

"Now, we've estimated that this planet has a slightly larger equatorial circumference that Earth—about twenty-five thousand miles, say. That gives us an area of about 200,000,000 square miles. Say that the mountains take up half of that and The Valley the other half. That leaves about 100,000,000 inhabitable square miles. We've figured there are about three hundred persons per square mile. That gives us about thirty billion. And that's enough to include all the people that were ever born.

It's been estimated that, up to the twentieth century, no more than four billion had been born During the twentieth there was a population of about eight billion The first part of the twenty-first saw another eight; the latter, none Of course we have all the sub-men, the Neanderthals, Titanthropi, Java apemen, Peking man, and the several dozen others that we now know existed But these probably never exceeded ten million, all told.

"That leaves us with twenty billion people, more or less, as the number that had been born up to the middle of the twenty-first century. There are about ten billion unaccounted for."

"Don't forget," interjected Black, "that no congenital idiots or children below the age of five were ever resurrected as far as we know."

"I'm not forgetting. But I don't think that ten billion infants died before five during man's time on Earth I've another theory to account for the fact that the population density is three hundred per square mile It is connected with the fact that Joe's people seem to be missing along here Plus the fact that if this is the end of a forty million mile long River, the headwaters shouldn't be on the equator."

"Why not?" asked Murel.

"Because we know that mankind was deposited along The Valley in a rough chronological sequence. Thus, the Victorians were about three-quarters of the River's length from the

headwaters. Providing, that is, that it is one continuous stream."

"What do you mean?"

"Just this. If we come to the source, and we don't pass any of Joe's people, I'd be inclined to think that there is more than one River. There could be eight thousand!"

"Eight thousand?"

"Yes. Several things support this view. For instance, I knew one twenty-first centurian who had lived close to River's End. He was killed, and woke up among people of his own time. Yet he'd died someplace on the northern hemisphere and had been translated to a place on the equator. That would seem to upset our view that we were scattered chronologically. Yet we know we are."

Black interrupted, "My MPA made a very rough census of the English-speaking Victorian block along the Valley. And we found that there was only about one quarter the number we'd predicted. But we thought the rest had originally been scattered up and down The Valley among other peoples. If what you say is true, there might be three other solid blocks of British and American nineteenth-centurians, each on a different stream."

Phyllis said, "You look pale, Dick? Are you ill?"

"I was just thinking of something."

Charbrass spoke, "Here's the picture of this planet as I think it may be. Imagine a lake twenty miles wide and four thousand miles long. It lies at right angles to the equator. Along one side of it are the outlets to each of the eight thousand Rivers. On the other side are the inlets."

Charbrass unfolded a piece of cigarette paper and began drawing a map on it with a piece of graphite

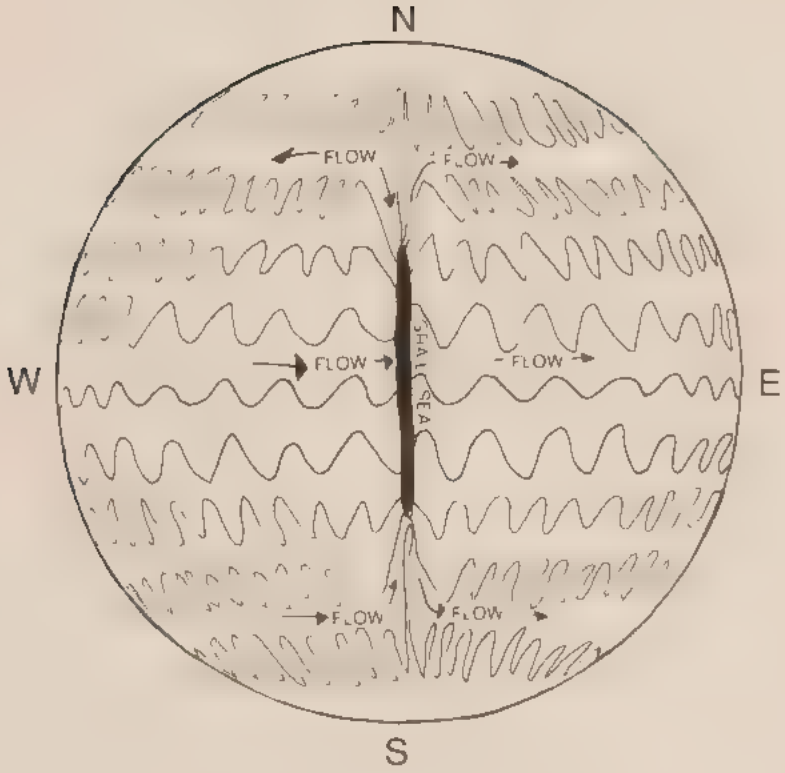
"I won't attempt to draw all the Rivers, of course. Just enough to give you an idea of the different sine waves whose form they must follow. Each one is 50,000 miles long and loops around our planet to pour back into the same lake from which it came, the one that Joe saw. However, I'll call it the Grail Sea because it's large enough to justify that term. The whole sea would be ringed with mountains

of solid rock, and the channel for each River would be separated from the other by about a half-mile of rock.

"Now, as I see it, every Valley has its dwellers scattered along it in chronological sequence, but there will necessarily be some nations and tribes you'll find along one River and not along the other simply because they never existed in large enough numbers to be spread all over. That's why we've not seen any of Joe's people.

"Ah, here we are!"

He handed Phyllis the rough sketch.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Phyllis said, "Do you know, that explains why there is an area of turbulence every thirty miles on The River? There has to be something, a force-field, perhaps, that shoves the stream along at a faster rate. It doesn't run downhill, of course, so something has to speed it up."

Black read the map and passed it on to Joe Caveman.

Joe said, "Why don't you paddle, Black?"

Phyllis looked behind her. "What's the matter? You're holding that paddle as if you were going to break it."

"What's the matter? God damn it, Phyllis, don't you know? What else does this mean but the repetition of a pattern I've followed all my life? Doesn't it seem as if the Fates. . .?"

He did not finish the thought but she knew what he meant.

So many times during his life, he'd been cheated out of a victory, just as he was on the point of winning. Or else, when he had a chance to win the fame and advancement he sought, the chance faded as he arrived on the scene. There had been numerous times in his military career when he had been frustrated in his ambitions because a war ended before he was ordered to the front, or because the jealousy of his obtuse superiors for their brilliant, if eccentric, subaltern had led them to put him in a position where he could not act.

Black had once told Phyllis that these did not really matter and that their only effect on him was cumulative. However, there was one event in his life which he had regretted bitterly.

That was when he had led an expedition into what was then really Darkest Africa to discover the headwaters of the Nile. When he was almost on the verge of success, he had become sick with fever. His lieutenant had pushed on ahead and found Lake Victoria Nyanza and thus gotten the credit. And though his friend had later committed suicide because of their harsh quarrel over the discovery and because he had been guilty of vicious lies concerning Black, the whole incident had blasted his happiness for many years thereafter.

All Earthly disappointments had however been wiped out

by the new life along The River. Those things just did not matter.

Yet, the memory of them was not entirely gone. And when he had been taken away from the *River Comet*, only a few weeks short of its launching, the similarity of the event to previous ones on Earth had made a strong impression. He had kept silent about them because it was his code to make light of his misfortunes and frustrations.

But this—this was too much.

"You'd better relax," warned Charbrass. "Otherwise, you'll explode."

Black began paddling furiously, his jaw tightly clamped and his black eyes fixed straight ahead.

Phyllis whispered, "Don't feel that way. There's nothing you can do about it."

He didn't answer. He felt as if there were a time bomb ticking away within his chest and that it was set to go off when he came into sight of the narrow cliffs from which The River would be boiling. If he found that this was indeed *another* Valley and that there were no paths along the cliffs that he could scale, that, in short, The River issued from a dead end, then that bomb within him would blast him into fragments.

Nobody around him might know when it exploded, but he would never again be a complete man. Something in him would be scattered and smashed against the invulnerable rocks of River's End.

5.

Twenty days later they heard a distant rumble. The current had been getting stronger, and they were tired of backing it. Beaching their large canoe, they began walking.

"I hope thith ith it," said Joe. "When I valk very far, my feet hurt. But I don't thee how thith could be River'th End. Ve haven't pathed any of my people."

Joe could not comprehend the concept of eight thousand streams. One was enough for him.

The Valley began narrowing, though The River itself was

as broad as ever. It raced by the plains, which slowly thinned out The cliffs pressed inwards, and presently they were at the bottom of a gloomy canyon.

Suddenly, there was no place to go except into the roaring waters themselves.

"Thith ith not it at all," rumbled Joe Caveman, sadly shaking his head. "Chethuth Chrith, Black Vhat'll ve do now?"

Yes, what now?

Black turned his back to the cliffs, those grim and incorruptible guards of the Big Grail.

"We could take the Suicide Express," he said

"Thuithide Ekthpreth?"

"Yes. P'raps, if we'd cut our throats often enough, we might eventually end up in your original Valley But if some random factor governs our translation from place to place, we could commit suicide every day for a thousand years and still not be sure if we were in the right Valley Not unless we walked to the beginning of each one to make sure which one it was. And I've no intention of doing that."

"What are you going to do?" asked Phyllis, looking upwards at him with an alarmed expression "You look so wild."

"Leave me alone" he said in a low tone

"But you look as if you could jump into The River"

"If you care to know, I have just mastered that temptation. Now, leave me alone."

They returned to the place where The Valley resumed its normal breadth There they ate a gloomy meal though Charbrass did his best to cheer everybody up After they had eaten, Black rose and walked to a large rock that jutted out from the bank He sat there a long time, a fixed and brooding figure.

"Satan in defeat," remarked Charbrass

"Lookth like a thabertooth Joe uthed to know," said the Titanthrop "He uthed to try to thneak up on Joe, and Joe vould thmell him and lambatht him with rockth or beat hith thkull with a club Joe and he had a regular feud until

the day Joe got mad and picked him up by hith tail and threw him ath over appetite He vath tho thocked he crept up on top of a rock and vouldn't come down for dayth And vhen he did he left town Hith thpirit vath cruthed, Joe guethed Or maybe it vath becauth he had a bad cathe of pileth."

Despite her concern, Phyllis had to giggle

Murel's narrow bony face became even longer

"I sympathize with Black," he said. "I can imagine how he feels He wants to get his hands around the throat of whoever is responsible for his being here I know that I'd like to strangle the perpetrator of this insoluble maze, this planetary rat-trap."

"Before you do any choking, shouldn't you find out first if their purpose is a worthy one?" asked Charbrass

"Aren't you angry?"

"No Why should I be? Did you get furious at God because He didn't explain why you were on Earth?"

"There was a Book that claimed to have the answers And I did get angry because I couldn't make sense out of it. But I repented afterwards."

"Very well Perhaps we will repent, too Or be able, some day, to determine a pattern in The Valley Or it may be that it's not even necessary that we have explanations of why we're here."

"Borbich!" snorted Murel.

"A good man," replied Charbrass.

That ended the conversation Everybody except Black found a sleeping place, and he came down from his rock when the moon rose Without a word, he lay down by Phyllis She knew better than to say anything to him, but she did not go to sleep until she heard the regular deep breathing which told that he had

It seemed only a few minutes later that she was awakened by him He was crouching by her side, listening to something Joe was telling him The moon, she noticed, was at its zenith.

"Ther'th a funny humming noithe coming from there"

He pointed toward the mountainside

"And Charbrath ith gone."

Murel joined them. "What's the matter?"

"Joe claims he can hear a steady hum from that direction. I can't hear it at all. Can you?"

Neither Murel nor Phyllis could detect it. At Black's suggestion, they picked up their weapons and climbed towards the source of the noise as stealthily as possible. After crossing several hills, they came to the foot of the mountains.

Joe stabbed a finger at a ledge about two hundred feet up. The ascent to it was fairly steep, but there were few loose stones or shale, for the hardy grass carpeted the slope for at least four hundred feet.

They climbed slowly, hoping that the moonlight would not reveal them, though a person above had only to glance down to see them. When they were opposite the ledge at a point about fifty yards away, they stopped behind a boulder.

Charbrass was standing upon the ledge and was facing a tall pillarshaped rock. He said something in a comparatively loud voice. Black, however, could not determine the individual words.

"Did you catch that, Joe?"

"Yeth."

"Charbrass must be able to hear subsonics or supersonics, whichever that sound is," whispered Phyllis. "It's lucky Joe can, too."

"Damn him! What's he doing?" asked Murel in a low but hoarse voice.

"Quiet! Or he'll hear us," ordered Black.

Charbrass seemed unaware of them. After pronouncing a phrase at the monolith, he stood still, as if waiting for something. Abruptly, the humming stopped. A second later, Charbrass collapsed.

The spectators watched him for a minute, puzzled as to what had happened. Then they decided thay could lose nothing by investigating. They left their boulder, but before they had taken more than a few steps, they halted in fear and wonder.

Charbrass' skin had faded away. He was left clothed only in his muscles, like a figure in an anatomical display.

Black broke into a run, but he stopped short of the area in front of the pillar of stone. He had no desire to step into the field of whatever force was stripping the corpse.

The others joined him and watched the swift disintegration.

First the skin, then the muscles and veins and arteries, then the organs, finally, the grey bones.

"Whatever is emanating from that pillar is tuned to the various parts of the body," said Black softly, "Otherwise, it wouldn't disappear in such a selective manner."

"The humming hath thtarted again," remarked Joe. "What'th more, it hurth Joe'th eardrumth."

"What did Charbrass say before he dropped dead?" asked Black.

"Joe doethn't get it. Charbrath thaid, 'Open, O Thethame!'"

"Joe! You're kidding!"

"No, Phyllith, Joe doethn't even know what that meanth."

"Out of the *Arabian Nights!*" breathed Black. "This is my meat!"

"Meat? Vere ith it?"

"He means," said Phyllis, "that he once made a very famous translation . . . well, never mind, Joe, you wouldn't understand about books."

"What do you make of it?" asked Murel, peering nervously at the bare space in front of the monolith.

"Obviously, Charbrass has been an agent for the builders of this planet," said Black. "I imagine there are plenty of them planted among us to watch us for reasons of their own. They're rather well disguised. I'd never have recognized Charbrass as one, or been able to prove it if I had. Yet, now that I do know what he is, I can look back on certain suspicious items.

"F'rinstance, his indifference to whether or not our projects succeeded. His refusal to sleep with a woman - though I'm not sure what that means. His vast knowledge,

which he shared only when directly asked about something. His easy ability to explain some puzzling factors. His dropping of little hints about psychotherapy His pacifism. His defence of the Church of the Second Chance without being identified with it.

"I think my subconscious must have been trying to connect all these clues in order to warn me. Charbrass was the conductor in that translation dream of mine, and I'll bet that's just what he is· a Valley conductor, guiding us towards our unknown goal."

"But why'd he leave us now?" asked Murel.

"The only reason I can think of is that he wants to make certain that the path which Joe once took to the headwaters is destroyed. He went this far with us because he wanted to be certain that this particular Valley wasn't the one Joe was originally in What's more, he'd have escaped us if Joe didn't have his infrahuman sense of hearing."

"Charbrass must have it, too, but he's human," Murel protested.

"Superhuman, I imagine."

"Well," said Phyllis, "now that we know all this, where do we go from here? Do we set up light housekeeping on this ledge in the hopes he'll came back and we can catch him?"

"Hardly," Black replied. "For all we know, his tour of duty is over, and the Valley will never see him again However, that's neither here nor there I intend to go after him."

"How?" was the chorus.

Black stepped in front of the pillar. "By doing what Charbrass did."

"But you'd have to die first!" cried Phyllis "How do you know you'll be resurrected elsewhere?"

"It's a safe assumption You can't imagine Charbrass committing permanent suicide, can you?"

He faced the blank monolith and said loudly "Open, O Sesame!"

"*Wait!*" called Phyllis "I couldn't just stand here and watch you be stripped of your body! I'll go with you!"

She went to his side and put her hand in his Together, they waited.

Five minutes passed, and nothing happened

"Is that humming still sounding?" Black asked.

"Yeth."

"Then we're not working the machine correctly At least, I suppose there's some sort of engine in that rock. Joe, can you repeat Charbrass' words with the same pitch and intonation?"

"Joe don't underthtand."

"Can you say it just exactly as Charbrass said it?"

Joe grinned. He was a natural mimic, and was pleased to attempt the imitation. He raised the pitch of his voice and repeated the phrase It sounded like Charbrass, all right

But there was no reaction.

Black thought furiously for a moment. Then his face brightened "Of course not! A lisper can't get it exactly right! Look, Murel, I'm going to repeat that phrase, following Joe's suggestions. If this works, then you will have to speak for him Which means you'll have to go together."

He sucked in his breath and called again. "Open, O Sesame!"

They waited while Black mentally ticked off sixty seconds

Phyllis said "We've missed something. We'll have to give it up." She sounded relieved.

"I'll never give up," he replied stonily. "P'raps the . ."

6.

The transition was smoothly done and without the interim of a dream.

Black awoke, lying upon a very long table of white metal. There was a machine at his feet and another at his head, which he supposed were connected with the re-creation of his body.

He sat up and saw that his three companions were just opening their eyes. Like him, they lay naked on other tables of white metal.

He got off his table and examined the room It was large,

with light green walls that seemed to curve outwards and then in toward a domed ceiling Except for the tables, there was no furniture.

At the bottom of Black's table lay a pile of clothes and a Grail. All dressed except Joe He had not been given any clothes, and would not have worn them if he had

Phyllis looked at Black as if to say, "What next?"

"There's only one doorway," he said. "We'll go out that "

They followed Black into an enormous room

"Big enough to make an airplane hangar," remarked Phyllis in hushed tones.

There were dozens of wheeled chairs scattered about Most of them seemed to have been left facing a huge metal screen in the center of the room. The four of them inspected the screen, but they could make nothing of it There were no dials anywhere upon it, though a dozen opaque tubes did project from it at a level with Black's chest

Joe's whisper was like a lion's coughing in the distance, "Vere are ve?"

"I imagine we're somewhere inside the Big Grail," replied Black "But we're helpless in the face of mechanisms we can't understand unless someone explains them So I propose we find that someone."

Joe froze, his head cocked to the right "Thomeone coming! Joe hearth footthtepth!"

"Silence!" ordered Black "Get beside that big doorway over there It's the only other entrance "

They flattened themselves against the wall, waiting Black was on one side of the doorway, yet he could hear nothing but his heart beating in his ears.

The next moment, a barefoot man stepped noiselessly into the room.

Charbrass

Black gave a shout, intending to freeze the engineer just long enough to delay a reaction, and leaped At the same time, Joe pounced from the other side of the door.

Charbrass made no attempt to resist Instead, he smiled and said easily, "I knew I heard someone, but I'd no idea it was you I thought it was one of the Builders "

Black decided to match the man's smoothness Now that he had attained his goal, he no longer felt that the time bomb in his chest was going to explode He could afford to be relaxed—up to a point.

Actually, there was much yet to be done; a vast abyss of wonder and mystery to explore. Yet, he had a sense of triumph which he had difficulty in suppressing.

"What about an explanation?" he asked softly

Charbrass smiled and shrugged. "Why not? You can't leave this place without my permission, and your memory of this incident will be wiped out"

"Oh, will it?" growled Murel, who had been looking wilder by the moment. "Maybe we'll have something to say about that! You're not God, you know, even if you think you are!"

"Of course not." He turned and looked at Black "But even if you do escape with your memories intact, no one will believe you Oh, a few will, perhaps, but it will just be another cult among thousands—another Church of the Second Chance. Again you will fail to get credit for your discoveries, Dick; you'll end up being another Borbich Can you stand another disappointment like that?"

Black lifted his grail in one hand. "Never mind that! Just start explaining! And if you try to escape, Charbrass, so help me God, I'll crack your skull with this!"

"That won't be necessary I'll be glad to show you just what has been going on. Sometimes I do wonder if you Valley dwellers should be kept so much in ignorance"

He walked toward the giant screen, the others flanking him, ready to seize him at the first unwarranted move. He ignored their tension and stood before the base of the screen In rapid succession, he wrapped his fingers around four of the opaque tubes.

"The heat from my hands actuates them. After that, my voice is sufficient to operate it. I have to speak a few phrases first so that the memory banks can determine what language I'm speaking, and after that, I give my requests orally."

Black became wary; it seemed to him that the man was

too calm and relaxed and was giving out information too readily. Was there a trick to this, or was he so confident that his audience would never be able to pass on their story to those in the Valley?"

"By the way," said Charbrass, "just how did you locate my port of entry and overhear my pass phrase?"

"Joe heard that humming," replied the Titanthrop.

Black swallowed a curse. Why couldn't the stupid apeman have kept his mouth shut?

Charbrass seemed to guess what Black was thinking, for he smiled at him. "We would have found out eventually, but thanks for the information. We had no idea that Joe's people had a high range of hearing. We'll have to change that method of location for our ports."

"Joe hath heard that humming before," said the giant. "But when Joe found out it alwayth came from big rockth. Joe gave up."

"Well, well," remarked Charbrass, "so it took earliest man to track down latest man? Very good! Joe Caveman to Jairus Charbrass, heh? Almost looks arranged, doesn't it? And when you think that all the Rivers curve back to the same lake from which they started, it all looks too symbolic to be true. However, it just happened that way, there was no prearrangement, I assure you."

He stepped back and looked up at the screen, which remained a blank.

"You people are the only ones who have gotten inside the Big Grail, although you'll probably not be the last. Somehow or other, a determined man will find a way.

"In fact, several men have gotten as far as the Grail Sea. One clothed himself in grass-padded skins and built an oxygen bottle and climbed over the mountains. But he lost his grail and starved to death. Another even more fantastic fellow built a balloon from skins and filled it with hydrogen made by primitive means. He floated through one of the inlets, only to fall into the sea and drown.

"It's a cliche, but it's true that where there's a will, there's a way."

"Vot happened to thothe men that climbed along the

cliffth? The oneth that Joe vath vith ven Joe thtumbled over the grail and fell into the River?"

"I don't know. But I do know that I'm going to destroy that path It may take quite a while for I'll have to search all eight thousand outlets from my floater

"Meanwhile, I've sent out a signal to Earth for a work-crew to cover the Big Grail again They should be here in a month or so."

"Come on, Charbrass," said Murel, hoarsely, his eyes wide and his hands working. "Tell what you know "

"You mean what *you don't* know Very well. It'll be a pleasure to bring a little enlightenment to you justifiably puzzled Valley people.

"First, I'll go back in time, a long way back "

He spoke to the screen, and it flickered into three-dimensional life. A cloud-streaked planet hung in space Earth.

"Time; about 75,000 B.C. The various types of sub-men are at their heyday. True man is on the verge of appearing as a mutation from Piltdown Man In fact, our anthropologists have located the exact date, time of day, month, year, and century, on which the very first Homo sapiens, Old Man Adam himself, was born."

"How could they do that?" asked Phyllis

"Watch, and you shall see. Aha, here they come!"

A needle-shaped vessel appeared on the screen and hovered to one side, far above the Earth

"The spaceship is from a planet which circles a sun not even in our galaxy. It is manned, if I may use that word in reference to very non-human beings, by a people whose lifespan is eternal, barring accidents Their species had attained intelligence about the time our earth was still cooling off And they had begun exploring interstellar space about the time the trilobites began swarming in Earth's hot seas. But so remote were they, and so numerous are the stars in this galaxy of ours, they had not discovered Earth until about 75,000 B.C."

Six great round objects left the spaceship and took up orbits at fixed distances from the globe below

"Scanning machines," said Charbrass. "They detect the brainwaves emanating from intelligent, or symbol-using, beings. Once that is done they begin 'photographing' the being, down to his last atom. And they make a continuous record of that being until he dies."

"That would take an incredibly developed science," said Phyllis.

"That is an understatement," replied Charbrass. "However, these six artificial satellites are 'merely' huge and automatic photographic machines. They do no developing, just scanning and recording."

"There is room in them for all the thirty billions of records they'll eventually make?" said Black.

"No, but one of the satellites is used for storage. When it is full it leaves for a planet of Rigel. Another comes in from Rigel and replaces it."

"And so on until the day that the Earthmen discovered this was going on?" asked Phyllis.

"You are anticipating me. But it is true."

"And I'll bet you're not from the twenty-first century at all?"

"You're right. The story I told you about Earth's life being killed by cobalt bombs is true. And Earth was resettled by colonists from Mars. These ex-Terrestrials who returned to their purged home planet were determined to found a new and sane society. And they succeeded.

"However, it was not until three hundred years later that they finally found the 'photo satellites.' Ever since space-travel had begun, scientists had been puzzled by certain unexplained phenomena just outside the atmosphere. They couldn't know that it was these machines, which were equipped to bend light-rays around them to confuse radar, and to make them invisible.

"Then one day the Terrestrials did solve the problem. Of course, by then they had progressed to a high ethical stage and were capable of correctly handling their discovery."

"When were you born?" asked Phyllis, irrelevantly.

"Oh, about a hundred and eighty years ago. Or about 3580 A.D."

[illegible] ence was affected

[illegible]

[illegible] Black [illegible]

[illegible] Charbrass [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[

his ethical development, he cannot be resurrected. His flesh may be duplicated, but the flesh is cold and soon rots. The animating spark is gone."

"In other words," said Black, sarcastically, "he is *too* good to live?"

"Exactly."

"I don't get it," said Murel. "What's the idea? Why try to reach this stage, why be a saint if it means you can't live forever and enjoy this universe, this flesh?"

"We know only this. That only the best of men—the unselfish, the devoted, the truly generous and the truly free, the intensely compassionate and living—only these go on to wherever they do go."

"I don't believe it!" said Murel. "The Great Beyond, indeed! Heaven! Nirvana! Soul! What are you trying to feed me?"

"I didn't say or even suggest what happens to them. Nor do I know if there is a soul or not. All I do know is that a really complete man seems to abandon the flesh, while the incomplete man does not."

"What about you?" Murel challenged. "You were just translated. You're pretty active."

Charbrass smiled.

"True. I haven't attained to that stage as yet. But I hope to."

Murel sneered.

"I thought you were some kind of a superman?"

"Oh, no. I am healthier in brain and body than most of you Rivermen. And my ethical development is higher, too. But I'm not perfect."

"You're no better than we are!"

"Have it your way."

Phyllis said, "Did you refuse to sleep with the Riverwomen because of your ethical development?"

"Would you go to bed with a sick or insane man?" he replied.

She gulped.

"Are we that repulsive?"

"Please don't think that I look on you as a sort of ape Far from it I love you But you'll realize how unsane we think you ancients were when I tell you why we did not resurrect children below five in The Valleys We found that those under that age still had a nervous system flexible enough to justify raising them in a sane society But those above five were almost beyond redemption, were too deeply stamped with the crooked ideals and modes of thinking of the ancients They might as well continue to be raised among you.

"The infants and the idiots, however, were put upon a separate planet—the Garden World and were raised by foster parents selected from my colleagues We could do that for the idiots because they, of course, were given reconstructed brains.

"I agree that most people are unbalanced," said Black "But why do you keep hidden? Why not treat us directly, as doctors do patients?"

"Because we have neither the facilities nor the room And if you were spread out among us we, too, might become infected, as a healthy body turns cancerous when a carcinoma bursts within it.

"No hard feelings, I hope I don't despise you, in spite of my frank statements of fact.

"Now, before we go into the operation of the control tower that you call the Big Grail, do you understand all I've told you?"

Silently, they nodded.

7.

Charbrass turned back to the screen "It is from here that we control the Valleys Whoever stands here is master of every man and woman on this planet He has more power than any dictator or madman ever dreamed of All the billions of mankind from 75,000 B C to 2154 A D are his subjects It is a great and terrible temptation that we Builders are faced with, only a totally sane man can be trusted in this room.

"We have to be made of steel to be able to live among

the Valley people and not become unbalanced ourselves. And that makes it all the more wonderful that there are those of you who can and do attain the highest ethical stage. Almost unbelievable.

"Why do we live among you then? Briefly, to observe your progress and accelerate your development It was we who started the Church of the Second Chance and the Knights of the Grail."

"Then Borbich was right?" exclaimed Black in a disappointed tone.

"Fundamentally, yes. He was wrong in his supernatural explanations, but that doesn't matter It is ethical standards that are desirable, not technological knowledge

"I'll give you a little demonstration of the capabilities of the control tower Is there anyone you'd care to locate? What about you, Black?

Quickly, before Black could answer, Phyllis said: "What about Borbich? I'm curious because I'd like to know if he died. And if he did, whether he was one of those who can't be resurrected."

"I doubt if he is," replied Charbrass "He was on the right track, but he's still too proud of his humility and his love for humanity But we shall see."

He spoke into a disk at the base of the screen

"Personal Locations."

"Personal Locations in circuit," answered a metallic voice

"Fyodor Mikhailovitch Borbich Born 1821, Lithuania Died 1881, Moscow, Russia. Profession novelist Physical characteristics Five ." He went on, giving a great deal of data to the machine.

Then, while the machine searched through the great memory banks buried beneath the Island of the Big Grail, the Builder turned to Black "What about you, Dick?"

Black happened to be looking at Phyllis then He saw her go pale, but it was a moment before he realized what had affected her Isabel, his wife! She was frightened that he might want to go back to her!

Before he could reply, the electronic voice announced

"Subject of inquiry is now in Area 4500-C of Valley 1490-N"

Upon the screen appeared a representation of the planet with a grid superimposed upon it. A green spot glowed in the Northern Hemisphere.

"That answers your question, Phyl. He was translated."

"This is only a minor question," she said, "but why did Sam get three cigars a day in his grail when the rest of us had to take pot luck? I thought that brands of cigarettes and cigars were created at random But Sam never got any smokes but those he wanted."

Charbrass smiled. "Clemens was indeed the favorite son of the gods One of the Builders liked his novels so much that he took an interest in his life, he fixed Sam's grail so that it didn't operate by chance—as far as cigars went, anyway.

"Now: Any more requests? What about you, Murel? Your wife? Children?"

Murel shook his head, his thin lips pressed tightly He was swinging his grail back and forth as if it were a pendulum connected to his thoughts

Charbrass said, "If you're thinking of violence, Murel, I warn you that the resurrection machine does not operate automatically inside the tower. Anyone killed is not duplicated unless the machine is specifically asked to do so"

Murel kept on swinging the hard white cylinder. "Why should I care if you're killed?"

"*Don't* try violence, Murel. I'm faster than you, and I might have to kill you in self defense"

"Kill me? Aren't *you* the ethical one?"

"It would violate my beliefs, but I'd do it because it would be necessary to keep control of this tower away from somebody like you."

The blond man narrowed his eyes, but he quit swinging the grail.

"You see," continued the Builder, "it's possible to cut off the power to any individual grail or prevent a person's translation And there are many other possibilities for control built into this machine.

"For instance, it is set up so that an order from an operator will destroy the photoprints of anyone in the records Moreover, if ordered to do so, the machine will destroy itself. We have built it to do that for the purpose of "

"That's all I wanted to hear!" shouted Murel He leaped forward, his grail lifted to bring it down on Charbrass' head.

Black jumped at Murel, at the same time, the Builder dodged away towards the door Joe Caveman bellowed and lunged at the running man, but he wasn't quick enough

Murel escaped Black's grasping fingers and ran through the doorway after Charbrass, shouting frenziedly The Titanthrop followed.

"Wait a minute, Dick!" called Phyllis as Black started after them. "Whether Murel or Charbrass wins, we're still in a spot. If Murel kills him, it'll be our turn next; you saw the look on his face He thinks he can be master of the whole planet And he could, for a while, until the Builders ganged up on him.

"But if Charbrass wins, he'll wipe out our memories of having been here and send us back to the Valley

"What do you want to do?"

"Honestly, Phyl, I don't know," he replied slowly "If I get control of the Big Grail myself, what can I do with it? Believe me, I'm not tempted to play God But I want nothing more to do with The Valley! I want to get off this planet, see other worlds, other peoples—the living, not the living dead."

"But you're one of them yourself!"

"Yes, but I've never been content to be one, and I never will. But what about you, Phyllis?"

"I want to go where you do I'd willingly follow you back to The River and be happy there After all, there is a mighty task to be done, and we could help in it "

"There might be if you believed Charbrass," he said "But how do we know he was telling us all the truth? What if the story of those who can't be resurrected again is a lie? What if it's designed to keep us domesticated, to marshal us

into certain patterns which they desire for their own purely selfish reasons?"

"My, God, Dick, you have to take something on faith!"

"P'raps."

He stopped to listen for sounds of the others

"They must be far off The only one I can hear is Joe. I think we should follow them."

"Please wait a minute," said Phyllis. "I have something to ask you."

Astonished, he paused.

"Yes?"

"If Charbrass should let you choose which section of The Valley you could go back to, would you . . well . . would you go to where Isabel is?"

"What a question! And at a time like this! It's not even worth answering. Let's go."

"No. Not until you tell me what you'd do."

"You can't force me to do something, you know," he replied in a hard voice.

"I'm not trying to," she cried, half-hysterically "It's just that I think I have a right to know! For a long time I've not been sure you were in love with me. I pretended to myself that you must be, but I've never really known I thought that as long as you couldn't find Isabel, anyway, you'd be satisfied with me. You liked me, and you were too cynical of women to think you'd do any better elsewhere. But the situation is different now. And I can't bear to wait. I must know what you intend to do "

"I intend to go after the others," he said, coldly.

He walked away, leaving her alone in the enormous room

A high-ceilinged hallway stretched before him. He passed many doorways, some of them opening to living-quarters, others to rooms filled with equipment whose purpose he could not guess. At the end of the hall he stopped, for there were no guiding signs, and he did not care to be lost. Just as he made up his mind to take the corridor to his right, he heard shouts from that direction. He ran towards the sounds, then stopped again as a series of small explo-

stons bounced off the metallic walls and echoed from its far end.

Murel appeared around a corner. He was pale and bloodyfaced, but he waved a sinister looking instrument in his hand.

"Don't run, Black!" he called. "This gun shoots energy beams. You couldn't possibly escape!"

Black waited until Murel was close before he spoke.

"What happened?"

"Charbrass ran into a room and tried to grab this gun. I threw my grat, and knocked him out. He's the clumsiest superman I ever saw! When he came to I told him he'd better give me all the information about the Big Grat, or I'd kill him right there. And he wouldn't ever come alive again, because I'd ask the machine to destroy its photos of him.

"Joe came in then, and wanted to know what I was going to do. I told him. He objected, said you wouldn't like that. I told him to shut up. I was going to kil. you too. He jumped me, and I thought I was a goner, for I didn't know how to operate this gun. But I pressed a stud, and it blew him apart.

"Charbrass tried to escape again, and I tore his head off."

Calmly, Black replied, "What do you intend to do with Phyllis and me?"

"What? Say, where is she?"

"I don't know."

"Don't pull that on me. Come on, where is she? Talk, or I'll splatter you all over these walls."

"Splatter away. I do not know, and if I did, I'd not tell you, you maniac!"

Suddenly, Murel's long bony face broke into a grin.

"Say, Black. You have guts. I could use you. Why don't you join me! We can be friends, buddies. Why not! We've the whole world at our feet, and it's big enough so we can split it and still not get jealous of each other."

"What would we do with it?" asked Black.

"What? What? Why *you* know! Think of it! We could have all the liquor we wanted, the most beautiful and famous women from Eve on up, and

"You can't really enjoy those women, anyway," cut in Black.

"Remember what you told us? Besides, a Builder spaceship will be here in a month What then? You can't fight their power and their science It just can't be done "

"*Ahhh!* You don't have the guts I thought you did! Tell you what, Black· I'm going to live like a god for a month, then, when the Builders show up, I'll have the machine destroy all its records and cut all the grail's power off

"There! What do you think of that?"

Black lost his composure "You're insane!" he gasped. "Hopelessly insane!"

"Don't give me any of Charbrass' crap! Think of it! I'll wipe out eighty thousand years of man's history! And thirty billion people! Hear that? Thirty *billion!* And that will mean the end of them forever! No more Project Resurrection!" He laughed wildly and then added "But if you'll throw in with me, we might be able to figure out some way of defeating the Builders."

"I'd like to," Black said cautiously, "but if it means wholesale massacre, count me out "

"We'll see, we'll see," said Murel. "Now turn around and march down that hall. We'll find Phyllis and see what she says Lovely woman, Phyllis I had her once, and I'd like her again."

Black said nothing He walked ahead of the weapon at his back, his mind working furiously. But he could think of no feasible plan And with every step towards the control room, he knew he was walking toward the death of a world Beside that irrevocable catastrophe, his own extinction seemed trivial.

They passed several doorways. Abruptly, there was the sound of a blow, a gasp, and the clatter of two metal objects striking the floor Black whirled in time to see Murel crumple Phyllis was behind him, reaching for the grail she'd dropped so she could hit him again

"I heard him," she said breathlessly, "so I hid in that side room "

She picked up her grail, then scooped up the energy gun with her other hand. "How does this work?"

"Don't point it at me!" he said swiftly. "And don't press that stud! I'd be blown apart."

"Thanks for the information." She stepped back and aimed the muzzle at the form on the floor.

Black was too astonished to do anything but flatten himself against the wall to avoid the oversplash of energy. She was carrying out a logical action, the only thing to do in view of the problem Murel posed. Nevertheless, he was surprised that she had not left the job to him.

The gun roared three times, and each time the body jerked beneath the impact. There was an odor of burning flesh.

Phyllis was very pale and grim. Her eyes were as wide as Murel's had been. She spoke in a high-pitched, unsteady voice.

"Dick, before we go back to the control room, I want to get one thing straight: Are you going to locate Isabel? Do you mean to bring her here?"

He eyed the muzzle, pointed somewhat shakily at his chest.

"And what if I do?"

"Don't answer me with another question. Can't you give me a straight answer? Yes or No?"

"Not until I know exactly what you mean to do. I don't care to be forced into making decisions blindly, you know."

"Very well. I know how stubborn you are, and how foolish I am in doing this, but I can't help it. I love you, and I won't lose you."

"Your actions certainly aren't very affectionate," he remarked drily.

"We're not discussing a hypothetical case over a cup of tea," she said. "This is real, and it's going to mean something horrible in a minute. You may not believe I can do it, but I can. I'm not the Phyllis you once knew."

"Very true. But you still hesitate to tell me just what you *are* going to do."

"If you intend to leave me for Isabel, I'll . . I'll kill you!"

He paled. "For God's sake, Phyl! You're out of your head! But don't think your threat frightens me. I'm just astounded that you'd think my death would solve anything. I'll be resurrected, if you order the machine to do it, but if you came with me to the Valley, do you think I'd have anything to do with you?"

"You don't understand," she replied a little less shakily, as if her determination were becoming stronger. "I'll ask the translator to deposit us in a different Valley than the one Isabel is in, and I'll have our memories of this day removed!

"As far as you or I will know, we were killed in our sleep last night and were translated elsewhere."

"That won't alter the fact that I didn't love you then."

She recoiled as if he had struck her. Her face, already pale, became gray.

"All right," she said hoarsely, "then I'll ask it to reproduce us from its records of twelve years ago and to destroy the others. When we wake up, we'll be puzzled about our amnesia because we'll know all that time has passed, but that's all we'll know.

"And you will be as you were then—very much in love with me."

"I believe you'd do it."

"Of course I will! What woman wouldn't?"

"Isabel wouldn't," he said. "She'd be horrified at the idea of using violence on me. And she'd do exactly what I wished, even if it meant eternal separation."

"I doubt that very much. And even if she wouldn't have the guts to do this, believe me, I have!"

"Why don't you just shoot, then, and get it over with?"

Her features softened somewhat. "Because I want you to love me of your own free will. I hate having to force you."

Black's thoughts hammered. He could promise her he would not locate Isabel, thus giving himself a chance to disarm her later—and forever think of himself as a coward.

Though it was the rational thing to do, he could not

bring himself to lie to her. Perhaps it was pride: a vast and towering and egomaniac pride. But he could not tell her one thing and be planning another.

Yet—and the thought almost crushed him—if he did not give in, he would be hurled back mentally to the Richard Black he had been twelve years before, robbed of all that had happened since then. And in his ignorance he would probably love Phyllis.

He faced it honestly and was astonished at his answer. He had no intention of finding Isabel. She was undoubtedly very well adjusted by now and in love with someone else. His own reappearance would only cause her shock.

And even if she wanted to take up where they had left off, it couldn't be done. Life in the Valley had changed him too much. He was not the old man who had died in 1890; it was curiosity alone that might have made him ask the translator where she was; he had no desire to be with her.

He could tell Phyllis that. But she might think he had done it through fear of her threats. Or would she? Didn't she know him better than that? Didn't she know he couldn't be forced?

But if she did, why did she threaten him at all?

Phyllis spoke again, interrupting his circling thoughts. "Dick, I won't let *anyone* else have you! I'll do what Murel was going to do! I'll destroy the records! I'll wreck the entire project!"

There was a moment when he felt again that time bomb in his chest—the cold, heavy weight and the consciousness that it was ticking away and would soon explode. The hall, Phyllis, and everything around him whirled for a second.

Suddenly, as if he had split in two, he saw himself step out from his flesh and walk down the corridor. It was a dim and transparent figure, but he could see it plainly. And he saw it dwindle as it walked away, growing smaller with each step. And at the end of the hall stood the marshalled hosts of the River, rank upon shadowy rank, thirty billion shades somehow crowded into the narrow space; yet they also stretched out for interminable miles, an army the eye

could not take in in one sweep and the brain could not encompass

Black's figure marched toward them, and shrank and shrank, until finally, as it reached the feet of the host, it was a tiny thing, indeed, a mere ant in size

Above it towered the world.

Black closed his eyes tightly, and the shock-induced vision was gone.

But it had shown him things in their true proportions Weighed against all of humanity, he was as unimportant as that minute figure had been.

He said, "Phyllis, I'll go with. . . ."

She, however, didn't hear him, for she had thrown the gun against the floor at the same time and was stumbling towards him, arms out, blinded by tears

She collapsed into his arms, crying "I can't do it! I can't do it, Dick! I'll have myself put back into the Valley with all memories of you erased That way, I can start all over again, and you can do what you want But I couldn't ever shoot you or force you to love me!"

He hugged her close His own tears fell on the top of her head.

"Phyl, Phyl, you didn't hear what I said! I'll go with you! And I said it because I suddenly realized what a big love you have for me, and what a small and frozen one I've had for you I think that last 'clutch of ice' you spoke of was thawed out Something happened inside me—something I've never known."

There were more words and tears and kisses Finally, Black, somewhat recovered, said "We must go back to the control room We'll give it orders to resurrect Murel and Joe and have them deposited somewhere. I think, though, we'll put Joe back among his own people, where he'll be happy.

"And we'll resurrect Charbrass, too, and tell him, p'raps, what we've done."

Just as he said that, they walked into the heart of the Big Grail, the control room.

Charbrass was by the screen, waiting for them

He was smiling, and he was somehow different. There was an almost visible aura about him, as if he no longer needed to put on a disguise and could allow his true self to shine through.

"You don't have to tell me your decisions," he said. "Everything you have done since you entered the Big Grail has been a test. Rather strenuous and painful, perhaps, but necessary."

Both Black and Phyllis were too surprised to comment.

"I told all four of you a few lies," he continued. "They weren't, in the strictest sense, ethical, but they were directed toward a good end and could not really hurt anyone. For instance, the machine will *not* obey orders to destroy records, or for that matter, to destroy anything. And those who die here *are* resurrected again. Builders such as myself are given a special and swift translation. Almost immediately after Murel killed me, I was alive again and watching you through the wall scanners."

Black found his voice. "Then you know we're going back to the River."

"Yes, but you can't do that."

"Why not?"

"Because you have passed the test. You see, all four of you were given the greatest temptation possible -the world and all its inhabitants since the dawn of man. Murel had been making some progress in his ethical development, but this was too much for him. He broke, and he will have to go back to the Valley. As for Joe, he'll be placed among his own kind, as you suggested.

"Murel has the knowledge of good and evil, but not the ability to choose wisely. Joe may have the ability in time to come, but he is still too much of an innocent.

"You two came through beautifully, though for a moment, there, I thought you were going to fail. But you, Black, conquered your pride, and you, Phyllis, your too-possessive love. Your decisions were the equivalent of pulling yourselves up by your bootstraps -as any moral decision is. But you did it.

"It sometimes happens that a great crisis will make or

break a person. This was it. But you're changed now, you've made a definite step forward.

"Unfortunately, or I should say, fortunately, you can't go back to the River. We need you elsewhere, we have work for people like you at Transition, a planet which is as different from this planet as you can imagine.

"But I must get your permission for one thing. That is, may I remove the memories of this conversation from your brains? I would like to let you keep them, but to do so would defeat the purpose of Transition Planet."

"Now—may I?"

"Do your worst," replied Black. "Or should I say, your best?"

Charbrass aimed a small, white tube at them. "This will be painless, but I'd rather you'd close your eyes."

As they did so, they heard his last words.

"God bless you, my children!"

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